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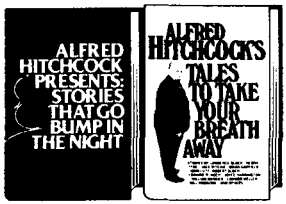

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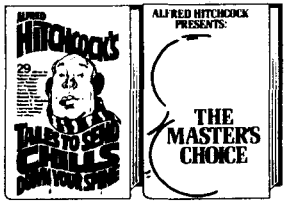

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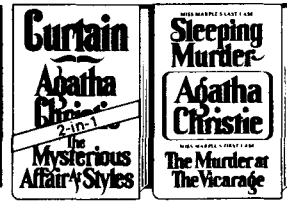

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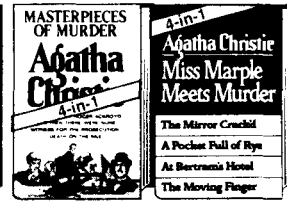

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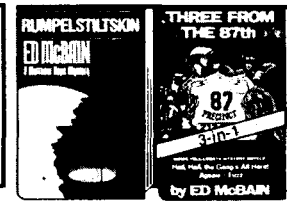

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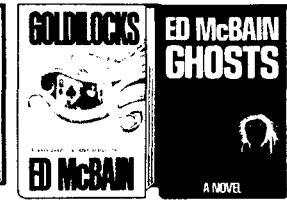

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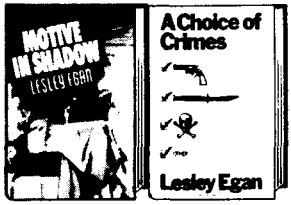

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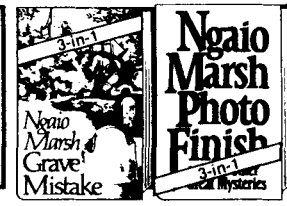

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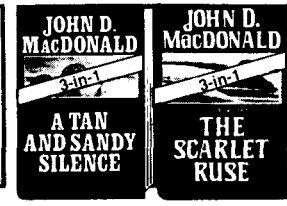

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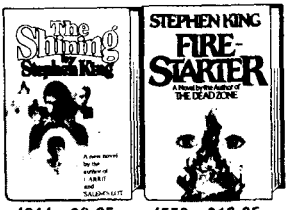

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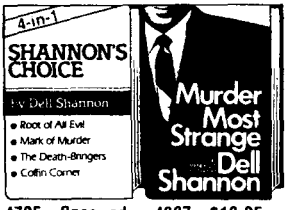

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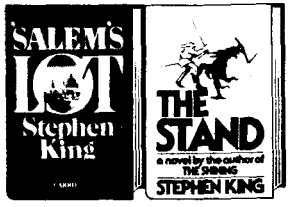

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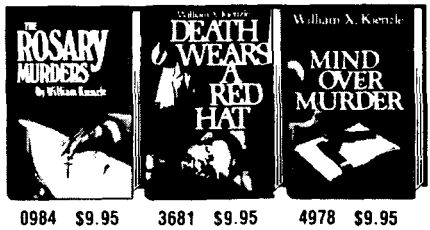

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a ***NEW*** short story by

RUTH RENDELL

Ford and Tricia had reconciled. They were now spending a second honeymoon on the African big-game reserve of Ntsukunyane. Now, there are rules of behavior in civilized living. Certain acts are strictly forbidden. It is dangerous to flout these rules—especially on a wild-animal reserve . . .

THE FEVER TREE

by RUTH RENDELL

Where malaria is, there grows the fever tree.

It has the feathery fern-like leaves, fresh green and tender, that are common to so many trees in tropical regions. Its shape is graceful with an air of youth, of immaturity, as if every fever tree is still waiting to grow up. But the most distinctive thing about it is the color of its bark, which is the yellow of an unripe lemon. The fever trees stand out from among the rest because of their slender yellow trunks.

Ford knew what the tree was called and he could recognize it but he didn't know what its botanical name was. Nor had he ever heard why it was called the fever tree, whether the tribesmen used its leaves or bark or fruits as a specific against malaria or if it simply took its name from its warning presence wherever the malaria-carrying mosquito was. The sight of it in Ntsukunyane seemed to promote a fever in his blood.

An African in khaki shorts and shirt lifted up the bar for them so that their car could pass through the opening in the wire fence. Inside it looked no different from outside, the same bush, still, silent, unstirred by wind, stretching away on either side. Ford, driving the

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two miles along the tarmac road to the reception hut, thought of how it would be if he turned his head and saw Marguerite in the passenger seat beside him. It was an illusion he dared not have and was allowed to keep for perhaps a minute. Tricia shattered it. She began to belabor him with schoolgirl questions, uttered in a bright and desperate voice.

Another African, in a fancier, more decorated uniform, took their booking voucher and checked it against a ledger. You had to pay weeks in advance for the privilege of staying here. Ford had booked the day after he had said goodbye to Marguerite and returned, forever, to Tricia.

"My wife wants to know the area of Ntsukunyane," he said.

"Four million acres."

Ford gave the appropriate whistle. "Do we have a chance of seeing leopard?"

The man shrugged, smiled. "Who knows? You may be lucky. You're here a whole week, so you should see lion, elephant, hippo, cheetah maybe. But the leopard is nocturnal and you must be back in camp by six p.m." He looked at his watch. "I advise you to get on now, sir, if you're to make Thaba before they close the gates."

Ford got back into the car. It was nearly four. The sun of Africa, a living presence, a personal god, burned through a net of haze. There was no wind. Tricia, in a pale yellow sun dress with frills, had hung her arm outside the open window and the fair downy skin was glowing red. He told her what the man had said and he told her about the notice pinned inside the hut: It is strictly forbidden to bring firearms into the game reserve, to feed the animals, to exceed the speed limit, to litter.

"And most of all you mustn't get out of the car," said Ford.

"What, not ever?" said Tricia, making her pale blue eyes round and naive and marble-like.

"That's what it says."

She pulled a face. "Silly old rules!"

"They have to have them," he said.

In here as in the outside world. It is strictly forbidden to fall in love, to leave your wife, to try and begin anew. He glanced at Tricia to see if the same thoughts were passing through her mind. Her face wore its arch expression, winsome.

"A prize," she said, "for the first one to see an animal."

"All right." He had agreed to this reconciliation, to bring her on this holiday, this second honeymoon, and now he must try. He must

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work at it. It wasn't just going to happen as love had sprung between him and Marguerite, unsought and untried for. "Who's going to award it?" he said.

"You are if it's me and I am if it's you. And if it's me I'd like a presy from the camp shop. A very nice pricey presy."

Ford was the winner. He saw a single zebra come out from among the thorn trees on the right-hand side, then a small herd.

"Do I get a present from the shop?" he asked.

He could sense rather than see her shake her head with calculated coyness. "A kiss," she said and pressed warm dry lips against his cheek.

It made him shiver a little. He slowed down for the zebra to cross the road. The thorn bushes had spines on them two inches long. By the roadside grew a species of wild zinnia with tiny flowers, coral red, and these made red drifts among the coarse pale grass. In the bush were red anthills with tall peaks like towers on a castle in a fairy story. It was thirty miles to Thaba.

He drove on just within the speed limit, ignoring Tricia as far as he could whenever she asked him to slow down. They weren't going to see one of the big predators, anyway, not this afternoon, he was certain of that, only impala and zebra and maybe a giraffe. On business trips in the past he'd taken time off to go to Serengeti and Kruger and he knew.

He got the binoculars out for Tricia and adjusted them and hooked them round her neck, for he hadn't forgotten the binoculars and cameras she had dropped and smashed in the past through failing to do that, and her tears afterward. The car wasn't air-conditioned and the heat lay heavy and still between them. Ahead of them, as they drove westward, the sun was sinking in a dull yellow glare. The sweat flowed out of Ford's armpits and between his shoulder blades, soaking his already wet shirt and laying a cold sticky film on his skin.

A stone pyramid with arrows on it, set in the middle of a junction of roads, pointed the way to Thaba, to the main camp at Waka-suthu and to Hippo Bridge over the Suthu River. On top of it a baboon sat with her gray fluffy infant on her knees. Tricia yearned to it, stretching out her arms. She had never had a child. The baboon began picking fleas out of its baby's scalp. Tricia gave a little nervous scream, half disgusted, half joyful. Ford drove down the road to Thaba and in through the entrance to the camp ten minutes before they closed the gates for the night.

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The dark comes down fast in Africa. Dusk is of short duration and no sooner have you noticed it than it is gone and night has fallen. In the few moments of dusk pale things glimmer brightly and birds murmur. In the camp at Thaba were a restaurant and a shop, round huts with thatched roofs, and wooden chalets with porches. Ford and Tricia had been assigned a chalet on the northern perimeter, and from their porch, across an expanse of turf and beyond the high wire fence, you could see the Suthu River flowing smoothly and silently between banks of tall reeds.

Dusk had just come as they walked up the wooden steps, Ford carrying their cases. It was then that he saw the fever trees, two of them, their ferny leaves bleached to gray by the twilight but their trunks a sharper, stronger yellow than in the day.

"Just as well we took our anti-malaria pills," said Ford as he pushed open the door. When the light was switched on he could see two mosquitos on the opposite wall. "*Anopheles* is the malaria carrier, but unfortunately they don't announce whether they're *anopheles* or not."

Twin beds, a table, lamps, an air conditioner, a fridge, a door, standing open, to lavatory and shower. Tricia dropped her makeup case, without which she went nowhere, onto the bed by the window. The light wasn't very bright. None of the lights in the camp were because the electricity came from a generator. They were a small colony of humans in a world that belonged to the animals, a reversal of the usual order of things. From the window you could see other chalets, other dim lights, other parked cars. Tricia talked to the two mosquitos.

"Is your name Anna Phyllis? No, darling, you're quite safe. She says she's Mary Jane and her husband's John Henry."

Ford managed to smile. He had accepted and grown used to Tricia's facetiousness until he had encountered Marguerite's wit. He shoved his case, without unpacking it, into the cupboard and went to have a shower.

Tricia stood on the porch, listening to the cicadas, thousands of them. It had gone pitch-dark while she was hanging up her dresses and the sky was punctured all over with bright stars.

She had got Ford back from that woman and now she had to keep him. She had lost some weight and bought a lot of new clothes and had highlights put in her hair. Men had always made her feel frightened, starting with her father when she was a child. It was then, when a child, that she had purposely begun *playing* the child with

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its cajolements and its winning little ways. She had noticed that her father was kinder and more forbearing toward little girls than toward her mother. Ford had married a little girl, clinging and winsome, and had liked it well enough till he met a grown woman.

Tricia knew all that, but now she knew no better how to keep him than by the old methods, as weary and stale to her as she guessed they might be to him. Standing there on the porch, she half wished she were alone and didn't have to have a husband, didn't, for the sake of convention and pride, for support and society, have to hold on tight to him. She listened wistfully for a lion to roar out there in the bush beyond the fence, but there was no sound except the cicadas.

Ford came out in a toweling robe.

"What did you do with the mosquito stuff? The spray?"

Frightened at once, she said, "I don't know."

"What d'you mean, you don't know? You must know. I gave you the aerosol at the hotel and said to put it in that makeup case of yours."

She opened the case although she knew the mosquito stuff wasn't there. Of course it wasn't there. She could see it on the bathroom shelf in the hotel, left behind because it was too bulky. She bit her lip, looked sideways at Ford.

"We can get some more at the shop."

"Tricia, the shop closes at seven and it's now ten past."

"We can get some in the morning."

"Mosquitos happen to be most active at night." He rummaged with his hands among the bottles and jars in the case. "Look at all this useless rubbish. 'Skin cleanser,' 'pearlized foundation,' 'moisturizer'—like some young model girl. I suppose it didn't occur to you to bring the anti-mosquito spray and leave the 'pearlized foundation' behind."

Her lip trembled. She could feel herself, almost involuntarily, rounding her eyes, forming her mouth into the shape of lisping. "We did 'member to take our pills."

"That won't stop the damn things biting." He went back into the shower and slammed the door.

Marguerite wouldn't have forgotten to bring that aerosol. Tricia knew he was thinking of Marguerite again, that his head was full of her, that she had entered his thoughts powerfully and insistently on the long drive to Thaba. She began to cry. The tears went on running out of her eyes and wouldn't stop, so she changed her dress

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while she cried and the tears came through the powder she put on her face.

They had dinner in the restaurant. Tricia, in pink flowered crepe, was the only dressed-up woman there, and while once she would have fancied that the other diners looked at her in admiration, now she thought it must be with derision. She ate her small piece of overcooked hake and her large piece of overcooked, bread-crumbed veal, and watched the red weals from mosquito bites coming up on Ford's arms.

There were no lights on in the camp but those which shone from the windows of the main building and from the chalets. Gradually the lights went out and it became very dark. In spite of his mosquito bites, Ford fell asleep at once but the noise of the air conditioning kept Tricia awake. At eleven she switched it off and opened the window. Then she did sleep but she awoke again at four, lay awake for half an hour, got up, put on her clothes, and went out.

It was still dark but the darkness was lifting as if the thickest veil of it had been withdrawn. A heavy dew lay on the grass. As she passed under the merula tree, laden with small green apricot-shaped fruits, a flock of bats flew out from its branches and circled her head. If Ford had been with her she would have screamed and clung to him but because she was alone she kept silent. The camp and the bush beyond the fence were full of sound. The sounds brought to Tricia's mind the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, imps and demons and dreadful homunculi which, if they had uttered, might have made noises like these, gruntings and soft whistles and chirps and little thin squeals.

She walked about, waiting for the dawn, expecting it to come with drama. But it was only a gray pallor in the sky, a paleness between parting black clouds, and the feeling of let-down frightened her as if it were a symbol or an omen of something more significant in her life than the coming of morning.

Ford woke up, unable at first to open his eyes for the swelling from mosquito bites. There were mosquitos like threads of thistle-down on the walls, all over the walls. He got up and staggered, half blind, out of the bedroom and let the water from the shower run on his eyes. Tricia came and stared at his face, giggling nervously and biting her lip.

The camp gates opened at five thirty and the cars began their exodus. Tricia had never passed a driving test and Ford couldn't see,

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so they went to the restaurant for breakfast instead. When the shop opened, Ford bought two kinds of mosquito repellent, and impatiently, because he could no longer bear her apologies and her pleading eyes, a necklace of ivory beads for Tricia and a skirt with giraffes printed on it. At nine o'clock, when the swelling round Ford's eyes had subsided a little, they set off in the car, taking the road for Hippo Bridge.

The day was humid and thickly hot. Ford had counted the number of mosquito bites he had had and the total was twenty-four. It was hard to believe that two little tablets of quinine would be proof against twenty-four bites, some of which must certainly have been inflicted by *anopheles*. Hadn't he seen the two fever trees when they arrived last night? Now he drove the car slowly and doggedly, hardly speaking, his swollen eyes concealed behind sunglasses.

By the Suthu River and then by a water hole he stopped and they watched. But they saw nothing come to the water's edge unless you counted the log which at last disappeared, thus proving itself to have been a crocodile. It was too late in the morning to see much apart from the marabout storks which stood one-legged, still and hunched, in a clearing or on the gaunt branch of a tree. Through binoculars Ford stared at the bush which stretched in unbroken, apparently untenanted, sameness to the blue ridge of mountains on the far horizon.

There could be no real fever from the mosquito bites. If malaria were to come it wouldn't be yet. But Ford, sitting in the car beside Tricia, nevertheless felt something like a delirium of fever. It came perhaps from the gross irritation of the whole surface of his body, from the tender burning of his skin and from his inability to move without setting up fresh torment. It affected his mind too, so that each time he looked at Tricia a kind of panic rose in him. Why had he done it? Why had he gone back to her? Was he mad? His eyes and his head throbbed as if his temperature were raised.

Tricia's pink jeans were too tight for her and the frills on her white voile blouse ridiculous. With the aid of the binoculars she had found a family of small gray monkeys in the branches of a peepul tree and she was cooing at them out of the window. Presently she opened the car door, held it just open, and turned to look at him the way a child looks at her father when he has forbidden something she nevertheless longs and means to do.

They hadn't had sight of a big cat or an elephant, they hadn't even seen a jackal. Ford lifted his shoulders.

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"Okay. But if a ranger comes along and catches you we'll be in deep trouble."

She got out of the car, leaving the door open. The grass which began at the roadside and covered the bush as far as the eye could see was long and coarse. It came up above Tricia's knees. A lioness or a cheetah lying in it would have been entirely concealed. Ford picked up the binoculars and looked the other way to avoid watching Tricia who had once again forgotten to put the camera strap round her neck. She was making overtures to the monkeys who shrank away from her, embracing each other and burying heads in shoulders, like menaced refugees in a sentimental painting.

Ford moved the glasses slowly. About a hundred yards from where a small herd of buck grazed uneasily, he saw the two cat faces close together, the bodies nestled together, the spotted backs. Cheetah. It came into his mind how he had heard that they were the fastest animals on earth.

He ought to call to Tricia and get her back at once into the car. He didn't call. Through the glasses he watched the big cats that reclined there so gracefully, satiated, at rest, yet with open eyes. Marguerite would have liked them; she loved cats, she had a Burmese, as lithe and slim and poised as one of these wild creatures.

Tricia got back into the car, exclaiming about how sweet the monkeys were. He started the car and drove off without saying anything to her about the cheetahs.

Later, at about five in the afternoon, she wanted to get out of the car again and he didn't stop her. She walked up and down the road, talking to mongooses. In something over an hour it would be dark. Ford imagined starting up the car and driving back to the camp without her. Leopards were nocturnal hunters, waiting till dark.

The swelling around his eyes had almost subsided now but his neck and arms and hands ached from the stiffness of the bites. The mongooses fled into the grass as Tricia approached, whispering to them, hands outstretched. A car with four men in it was coming along from the Hippo Bridge direction. It slowed down and the driver put his head out. His face was brick-red, thick-featured, his hair corrugated blond, and his voice had the squashed vowel accent of the white man born in Africa.

"The lady shouldn't be out on the road like that."

"I know," Ford said. "I've told her."

"Excuse me, d'you know you're doing a very dangerous thing, leaving your car?"

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The voice had a hectoring boom. Tricia blushed. She bridled, smiled, bit her lip, though she was in fact very afraid of this man who was looking at her as if he despised her, as if she disgusted him. When he got back to camp, would he betray her?

"Promise you won't tell on me?" she faltered, her head on one side.

The man gave an exclamation of anger and withdrew his head. The car moved forward. Tricia gave a skip and a jump into the passenger seat beside Ford. They had under an hour to get back to Thaba and Ford followed the car with the four men in it.

At dinner they sat at adjoining tables. Tricia wondered how many people they had told, for she fancied that some of the diners looked at her with curiosity or antagonism. The man with fair curly hair they called Eric boasted loudly of what he and his companions had seen that day, a whole pride of lions, two rhinoceros, hyena, and the rare sable antelope.

"You can't expect to see much down that Hippo Bridge road, you know," he said to Ford. "All the game's up at Sotingwe. You take the Sotingwe road first thing tomorrow and I'll guarantee you lions."

He didn't address Tricia, he didn't even look at her. Ten years before men in restaurants had turned their heads to look at her and though she had feared them, she had basked, trembling, in their gaze. Walking across the grass, back to their chalet, she held on to Ford's arm.

"For God's sake, mind my mosquito bites," said Ford.

He lay awake a long while in the single bed a foot away from Tricia's, thinking about the leopard out there beyond the fence that hunted by night. The leopard would move along the branch of a tree and drop upon its prey. Lionesses hunted in the early morning and brought the kill to their mate and the cubs. Ford had seen all that sort of thing on television. How cheetahs hunted he didn't know except that they were very swift. An angry elephant would lean on a car and crush it or smash a windshield with a blow from its foot.

It was too dark for him to see Tricia but he knew she was awake, lying still, sometimes holding her breath. He heard her breath released in an exhalation, a sigh, that was audible above the rattle of the air conditioner.

Years ago he had tried to teach her to drive. They said a husband should never try to teach his wife, he would have no patience with her and make no allowances. Tricia's progress had never been maintained, she had always been liable to do silly reckless things and then he had shouted at her. She took a driving test and failed and

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she said this was because the examiner had bullied her. Tricia seemed to think no one should ever raise his voice to her, and at one glance from her all men should fall slaves at her feet.

He would have liked her to be able to take a turn at driving. There was no doubt you missed a lot when you had to concentrate on the road. But it was no use suggesting it. Theirs was one of the first cars in the line to leave the gates at five thirty, to slip out beyond the fence into the gray dawn, the still bush. At the stone pyramid, on which a family of baboons sat clustered, Ford took the road for Sotingwe.

A couple of miles up they came upon the lions. Eric and his friends were already there, leaning out of the car windows with cameras. The lions, two full-grown lionesses, two lioness cubs and a lion cub with his mane beginning to sprout, were lying on the roadway. Ford stopped and parked the car on the opposite side to Eric.

"Didn't I say you'd be lucky up here?" Eric called to Tricia. "Not got any ideas about getting out and investigating, I hope."

Tricia didn't answer him or look at him. She looked at the lions. The sun was coming up, radiating the sky with a pinkish-orange glow, and a little breeze fluttered all the pale green, fern-like leaves. The larger of the adult lionesses, bored rather than alarmed by Eric's elaborate photographic equipment, got up slowly and strolled into the bush, in among the long dry grass and the red zinnias. The cubs followed her, the other lioness followed her. Through his binoculars Ford watched them stalk with proud lifted heads, walking, even the little ones, in a graceful, measured, controlled way. There were no impala anywhere, no giraffe, no wildebeest. The world here belonged to the lions.

All the game was gathered at Sotingwe, near the water hole. An elephant with ears like punkahs was powdering himself with red earth blown out through his trunk. Tricia got out of the car to photograph the elephant and Ford didn't try to stop her. He scratched his mosquito bites which had passed the burning and entered the itchy stage.

Once more Tricia had neglected to pass the camera strap around her neck. She made her way down to the water's edge and stood at a safe distance—was it a safe distance? Was any distance safe in here?—looking at a crocodile. Ford thought, without really explaining to himself or even fully understanding what he meant, that it was the wrong time of day, it was too early. They went back to Thaba for breakfast.

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At breakfast and again at lunch Eric was full of what he had seen. He had taken the dirt road that ran down from Sotingwe to Suthu Bridge and there, up in a tree near the water, had been a leopard. Malcolm had spotted it first, stretched out asleep on a branch, a long way off but quite easy to see through field glasses.

"Massive great fella with your authentic square-type spots," said Eric, smoking a cigar.

Tricia, of course, wanted to go to Suthu Bridge, so Ford took the dirt road after they had had their siesta. Malcolm described exactly where he had seen the leopard which might, for all he knew, still be sleeping on its branch.

"About half a mile up from the bridge. You look over on your left and there's a sort of clearing with one of those trees with yellow trunks in it. This chap was on a branch on the right side of the clearing."

The dirt road was a track of crimson earth between green verges. Ford found the clearing with the single fever tree but the leopard had gone. He drove slowly down to the bridge that spanned the sluggish green river. When he switched off the engine it was silent and utterly still, the air hot and close, nothing moving but the mosquitos that danced in their haphazard yet regular measure above the surface of the water.

Tricia was getting out of the car as a matter of course now. This time she didn't even trouble to give him the coy glance that asked permission. She was wearing a red and white striped sundress with straps that were too narrow and a skirt that was too tight. She ran down to the water's edge, took off a sandal, and dipped in a daring foot. She laughed and twirled her foot, dabbling the dry round stones with water drops. Ford thought how he had loved this sort of thing when he had first met her, and now he was going to have to bear it for the rest of his life. He broke into a sweat as if his temperature had suddenly risen.

She was prancing about on the stones and in the water, holding up her skirt. There were no animals to be seen. All afternoon they had seen nothing but impala, and the sun was moving down now, beginning to color the hazy pastel sky. Tricia, on the opposite bank, broke another Ntsukunyane rule and picked daisies, tucking one behind each ear. With a flower between her teeth like a Spanish dancer, she swayed her hips and smiled.

Ford turned the ignition key and started the car. It would be dark in just over an hour and long before that they would have closed

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the gates at Thaba. He moved the car forward, reversed, making what Tricia, no doubt, would call a three-point turn. Facing toward Thaba now, he put the shift into drive, his foot on the accelerator, and took a deep breath as the sweat trickled between his shoulder blades. The heat made mirages on the road and out of them a car was coming. Ford stopped and switched off the engine. It wasn't Eric's car but one belonging to a couple of young Americans on holiday. The boy raised his hand in a salute at Ford.

Ford called out to Tricia, "Come on or we'll be late."

She got into the car, dropping her flowers onto the roadway. Ford had been going to leave her there, that was how much he wanted to be rid of her. Her body began to shake and she clasped her hands tightly together so that he shouldn't see. He had been going to drive away and leave her there to the darkness and the lions, the leopard that hunted by night. He had been driving away, only the Americans' car had come along.

She was silent, thinking about it. The American turned back soon after they did and followed them up the dirt road. Impala stood around the solitary fever tree, listening perhaps to inaudible sounds or scenting invisible danger. The sky was smoky yellow with sunset. Tricia thought about what Ford must have intended to do—drive back to camp just before they closed the gates, watch the darkness come down, knowing she was out there, say not a word of her absence to anyone—and who would miss her? Eric? Malcolm? Ford wouldn't have gone to the restaurant and in the morning when they opened the gates he would have driven away. No need even to check out at Ntsukunyane where you paid weeks in advance.

The perfect murder. Who would search for her, not knowing there was need for search? And if her bones were found? One set of bones, human, impala, waterbuck, looks very much like another when the jackals have been at it and the vultures. And when he reached home he would have said he had left her for Marguerite . . .

He was nicer to her that evening, gentler. Because he was afraid she had guessed or might guess the truth of what had happened at Sotingwe?

"We said we'd have champagne one night. How about now? No time like the present."

"If you like," Tricia said.

She felt sick all the time, she had no appetite. Ford toasted them in champagne.

"To us!"

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He ordered the whole gamut of the menu, soup, fish, wiener schnitzel, creme brulee. She picked at her food, thinking how he had meant to kill her. She would never be safe now, for having failed once he would try again. Not the same method perhaps but some other. How was she to know he hadn't already tried? Perhaps, for instance, he had substituted aspirin for those quinine tablets, or when they were back at the hotel in Mombasa he might try to drown her. She would never be safe unless she left him.

Which was what he wanted, which would be the next best thing to her death. Lying awake in the night, she thought of what leaving him would mean—going back to live with her mother while he went to Marguerite. He wasn't asleep either. She could hear the sound of his irregular wakeful breathing. She heard the bed creak as he moved in it restlessly, the air conditioner grinding, the whine of a mosquito.

Now, if she hadn't already been killed, she might be wandering out there in the bush, in terror in the dark, afraid to take a step but afraid to remain still, fearful of every sound yet not knowing which sound most to fear. There was no moon. She had taken note of that before she came to bed and had seen in her diary that tomorrow the moon would be new. The sky had been overcast at nightfall and now it was pitch-dark. The leopard could see, perhaps by the light of the stars or with an inner instinctive eye more sure than simple vision, and would drop silently from its branch to sink its teeth into the lifted throat.

The mosquito that had whined stung Ford in several places on his face and neck and on his left foot. He had forgotten to use the repellent the night before. Early in the morning, at dawn, he got up and dressed and went for a walk round the camp. There was no one about but one of the African staff, hosing down a guest's car. Squeaks and shufflings came from the bush beyond the fence.

Had he really meant to rid himself of Tricia by throwing her, as one might say, to the lions? For a mad moment, he supposed, because fever had got into his blood, poison into his veins. She knew, he could tell that. In a way it might be all to the good, her knowing; it would show her how hopeless the marriage was that she was trying to preserve.

The swellings on his foot, though covered by his sock, were making the instep bulge through the sandal. His foot felt stiff and burning and he became aware that he was limping slightly. Supporting him-

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self against the trunk of a fever tree, his skin against its cool, dampish, yellow bark, he took off his sandal and felt his swollen foot tenderly with his fingertips. Mosquitos never touched Tricia; they seemed to shirk contact with her pale dry flesh.

She was up when he hobbled in; she was sitting on her bed, painting her fingernails. How could he live with a woman who painted her fingernails in a game reserve?

They didn't go out till nine. On the road to Waka-suthu, Eric's car met them, coming back.

"There's nothing down there for miles, you're wasting your time."

"Okay," said Ford. "Thanks."

"Sotingwe's the place. Did you see the leopard yesterday?"

Ford shook his head.

"Oh, well, we can't all be lucky."

Elephants were playing in the river at Hippo Bridge, spraying each other with water and nudging heavy shoulders. Ford thought that was going to be the high spot of the morning until they came upon the kill. They didn't actually see it. The kill had taken place some hours before, but the lioness and her cubs were still picking at the carcase, at a blood-blackened rib cage.

They sat in the car and watched. After a while the lions left the carcase and walked away in file through the grass, but the little jackals were already gathered, a pack of them, posted behind trees. Ford came back that way again at four and by then the vultures had moved in, picking the bones.

It was a hot day of merciless sunshine, the sky blue and perfectly clear. Ford's foot was swollen to twice its normal size. He noticed that Tricia hadn't once left the car that day, nor had she spoken girlishly to him or giggled or given him a roguish kiss. She thought he had been trying to kill her, a preposterous notion really. The truth was he had only been giving her a fright, teaching her how stupid it was to flout the rules and leave the car.

Why should he kill her, anyway? He could leave her, he *would* leave her, and once they were back in Mombasa he would tell her so. The thought of it made him turn to her and smile. He had stopped by the clearing where the fever tree stood, yellow of bark, delicate and fern-like of leaf, in the sunshine like a young sapling in springtime.

"Why don't you get out any more?"

She faltered, "There's nothing to see."

"No?"

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He had spotted the porcupine with his naked eye but he handed her the binoculars. She looked and she laughed with pleasure. That was the way she used to laugh when she was young, not from amusement but delight. He shut his eyes.

"Oh, the sweetie porky-pine!"

She reached on to the back seat for the camera. And then she hesitated. He could see the fear, the caution, in her eyes. Silently he took the key out of the ignition and held it out to her on the palm of his hand. She flushed. He stared at her, enjoying her discomfiture, indignant that she should suspect him of such baseness.

She hesitated but she took the key. She picked up the camera and opened the car door, holding the key on its fob in her left hand and the camera in her right. He noticed she hadn't passed the strap of the camera, his treasured Pentax, round her neck. For the thousandth time he could have told her but he lacked the heart to speak. His swollen foot throbbed and he thought of the long days at Ntsukunyane that remained to them. Marguerite seemed infinitely far away, farther even than at the other side of the world where she was.

He knew Tricia was going to drop the camera some fifteen seconds before she did so. It was because she had the key in her other hand. If the strap had been round her neck it wouldn't have mattered. He knew how it was when you held something in each hand and lost your grip or your footing. You had no sense then, in that instant, of which of the objects was valuable and mattered and which was not. Tricia held on to the key and dropped the camera. The better to photograph the porcupine, she had mounted on to the twisted roots of a tree, roots that looked as hard as a flight of stone steps.

She gave a little cry. At the sounds of the crash and the cry the porcupine erected its quills. Ford jumped out of the car, wincing when he put his foot to the ground, hobbling through the grass to Tricia who stood as if petrified with fear of him. The camera, the pieces of camera, had fallen among the gnarled, stone-like tree roots. He dropped onto his knees, shouting at her, cursing her.

Tricia began to run. She ran back to the car and pushed the key into the ignition. The car was pointing in the direction of Thaba and the clock on the dashboard shelf said five thirty-five. Ford came limping back, waving his arms at her, his hands full of broken pieces of camera. She looked away and put her foot down hard on the accelerator.

The sky was clear orange with sunset, black bars of the coming

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night lying on the horizon. She found she could drive when she had to, even though she couldn't pass a test. A mile along the road she met the American couple. The boy put his head out.

"Anything worth going down there for?"

"Not a thing," said Tricia. "You'd be wasting your time."

The boy turned his car round and followed her back. It was two minutes to six when they entered Thaba, the last cars to do so, and the gates were closed behind them.

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

We nominate Mr. Leonard Strang, the gnomelike science teacher at Aldershot High School, as the High School Teacher of the Year, and we propose this newest exploit as Mr. Strang's Triumph of the Year, perhaps the Triumph of his Career—or Mr. Strang's Finest Hour . . .

MR. STRANG AND THE LOST SHIP

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

While nobody can deny the scenic beauty of New England's rocky coast, the snowfall in mid-winter can be abundant. This was one factor that Mr. Strang, Aldershot High School's gnomelike science teacher, failed to take into consideration when he decided to spend a long weekend in February at Ye Chandler's Inne in the little fishing village of Pixley's Cove.

The invitation had been extended by Edward Hotchkiss, the owner of the Inne and a former college classmate of Mr. Strang's. "It's as balmy as spring, and almost no snow on the ground," was how Hotchkiss put it during his telephone conversation. "C'mon up to our rock-strewn coast. Things are kind of slow here, so we'll have plenty of time to talk over the old days, and you can get some sightseeing in. The room and grub's on me."

The bus had arrived at Pixley's Cove late Thursday evening—or extremely early Friday morning, to be more exact. Once in his room Mr. Strang collapsed on the bed as if poleaxed and slept for ten hours. It was during those ten hours that the skies unleashed the

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full fury of winter, dropping some twenty-four inches of snow on the area.

Now it was Sunday morning, and Mr. Strang had a severe case of cabin fever. Oh, the roads had been plowed, and there was no question that he'd be able to get his bus home to Aldershot at four that afternoon. It was just that there was nothing to do, no place to go, nothing to occupy his mind. The stony fields and scenic beauty of the area were covered with a thick blanket of white, most of the shops—except the grocery and hardware stores—were closed for the season, and the local movie theater was featuring a monument to cinematic tastelessness called "Disco Zombie." Books were scarce, the available ones being two syrupy romantic novels, a half-dozen tales involving The Five Little Peppers, and a volume on how to repair one's own plumbing.

Cataloguing the good times they'd had in college and bringing each other up to date had taken Hotchkiss and Mr. Strang some three hours on Friday afternoon. And since that time only one form of entertainment had been available.

Checkers. Mr. Strang, more used to chess, played hard and diligently. But he was no match for his host, and at a nickel a game the teacher now owed Hotchkiss one dollar and twenty cents.

"Eddie," Mr. Strang said when the last of his men had been taken from the board, "you are an exemplary innkeeper, and I am an absolute churl of a guest. But if I so much as see another checker I shall froth at the mouth, I shall swing from the lighting fixtures, I shall dance the gavotte in the rooms of your other guests wearing only underwear and a seductive smile. I've got to find some kind of activity. Something to occupy my mind and body. Something to *do*!"

"Umm." Hotchkiss chewed the stem of his pipe and mulled the problem over in his mind. "Well, there is—no, I guess you wouldn't want to—"

"I have seven—long—hours—before my bus leaves," replied Mr. Strang ponderously. "Anything, Eddie."

"Our village museum," Hotchkiss said with his Yankee twang. "It ain't much, but being a teacher and all, you might find it interesting."

"Which way is it?" Already the teacher was reaching for his overcoat and boots.

"Hold on a bit. The museum don't actually open until April. But I'll call Miz Quinn. She's in charge of it. Mayor Blore, too. He's right proud of the place and he'll want to come down to show you around."

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Mr. Strang froze with one arm jammed into the sleeve of his coat. "You mean the museum will be opened up just for me?" he asked incredulously.

"Yep. Oh, Miz Quinn and Artis Blore will be glad to do it. It'll give 'em something to keep their minds occupied. Time hangs heavy around here the middle of winter."

"Yes, I happened to notice that." Hotchkiss was unaware of the irony of the remark.

Ten minutes later the teacher was standing on the steps of the clapboard house that was the Pixley's Cove Museum. He bent his gloved hands together to generate some warmth, while at the door Ruth Quinn, a rather plump woman in her mid-forties, removed a key from her purse. On the plowed sidewalk Artis Blore implored Miss Quinn to hurry before they all froze to death.

The interior of the building was minimally heated to keep the pipes from freezing. "But we'd best keep our coats on," said Blore. And Mr. Strang was glad to oblige.

In the center of the single large room that made up the quaint museum was a model, some four feet square, covered with sheets of clear plastic. It was an area of land and several tiny buildings, each with its side cut away to show the interior.

"That's the old Armell Glass Works," Ruth Quinn began. "Of course it's only an approximation because nobody knows—"

"I'll explain, if you don't mind, Miss Quinn," said Blore officiously. "The Armell Glass Works, Mr. Strang, was the first industry in Pixley's Cove. It was started in the mid-eighteenth century by the Bradwick brothers, Armand and Ellis—hence the name Armell. It apparently fell to ruin some time around eighteen hundred. We can't be more certain of the date because—"

"The fact of the matter is," Ruth Quinn cut in, "nobody knows where in town the glass works is—that is, was located. Oh, when the old village building was torn down we found lots of material about the place—bills of lading and pay records and such. But none of it told where the works actually stood."

Mr. Strang's face took on an impish grin. "Perhaps it never existed at all," he said slyly. "Maybe somebody just worked out all those records to confuse future generations."

"Oh, it existed, all right," said Blore seriously. "We've even got a sample of their work." He strode toward the wall opposite the door. "Now here's an item that was actually made at the glass works. It's an excellent example of—of—Yeee!"

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At the sound of Mayor Blore's shrill scream, Ruth ran to him, followed by Mr. Strang. The mayor had one hand over his eyes; the other pointed to a small display stand. "Look. Look there!" he said in what seemed to be sheer panic. "What do you see?"

"A little wooden holder with a bottle lying on it," said the teacher.

"Go—go on."

"The top of the bottle's capped with cord, tied in some kind of a complicated knot. And there's nothing in the bottle. Clay, perhaps. Or putty."

"What else?" demanded Blore in a shaky voice.

"That's all."

"That's all, he says!" moaned Blore. "That can't be all." He lowered his hand from his eyes. "It's gone. But it can't be gone."

Mr. Strang turned to Ruth. "Is he always like this?" he asked. "Or is there really something wrong?"

"Something is very definitely wrong," she replied. "You see, when we closed the museum last fall that bottle had a ship in it!"

For a moment Mr. Strang just stared at Ruth Quinn in amazement. "A what?" he asked finally.

"A ship—a model. With masts and sails and all that. The kind they put in bottles. Only this one seems to have disappeared."

"Kind of sailed off into the sunset, you mean?" Mr. Strang peered into the bottle, where the waves of the green putty sea surged in neat rows as if the ship had sunk beneath them, never to be seen again.

"This is no time for comedy, Mr. Strang!" snapped Blore. "I'm just thankful whoever did this didn't take the bottle as well."

"It must be hard enough getting a ship *into* a bottle," said Ruth slowly. "But how on earth do you go about getting one *out*? Especially through that narrow neck."

In spite of the evident consternation of both Ruth Quinn and Artis Blore, Mr. Strang could have hugged them both. Here was a problem, something to put his mind to. For the first time in two days he found himself hoping the bus that would take him home might be a bit late.

"Perhaps I can help," he said diffidently.

"Oh, I don't think—" Ruth began.

"I'll take any help I can get," said Blore, firmly overruling the museum's curator.

"Very well. Now what is there about this bottle that's so all-fired

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important? I mean, ships in bottles aren't exactly a rarity. Especially in New England."

Blore reeled his way to a chair and motioned Ruth and Mr. Strang into others. "This all has to do with the Armell Glass Works," he said, mopping a suddenly sweaty brow with a handkerchief. "We know it existed. We just don't know where. When we find the location, the village board and the chamber of commerce plan to reconstruct the place, just as it stood two hundred years ago. It'll make quite a tourist attraction. In fact, we've offered a substantial reward to anyone who can find where it stood. And whoever owns that land will get a pretty penny for it, I can tell you!"

"I see," said the teacher. "But the bottle itself—"

"I think I can help you there," said Ruth. "The glass works, according to the records, produced primarily crown glass. That was made by blowing a bubble of heated glass and then spinning it rapidly at the end of a rod so that it formed a big disc, sometimes fifty inches in diameter. When the glass cooled, the disc was cut into window panes. Armell glass was quite suitable for this, as it was almost clear, with only a slight bluish tinge, as you can see from the bottle there."

"Then the glass works also made bottles, eh?" asked the teacher.

Ruth shook her head. "Not during the working day. But when the day ended, there was usually some molten glass left in the crucible. Off-hand glass, it was called. And that became the property of the gaffer."

"The what?"

"The master glass blower was called a gaffer," she replied with a smile. "Anyway, the gaffer at the Armell Works—his name was Noah Sterner, by the way—made these bottles from leftover glass. The few that remain intact are quite famous and rather valuable. But here in Pixley's Cove—where the bottles came from in the first place—we have only this single example."

"The bottle was found by a farm boy doing the spring plowing," added Blore. "I convinced him he should give it to the town rather than our buying it. In any case, we thought it would add a little interest—and point up the seafaring heritage of Pixley's Cove—if there were a ship inside. So Chris Wayde stuck one in there, gratis." Blore winked at Mr. Strang. "For the benefit of the village, you know."

Ruth Quinn walked back to where the bottle lay on its wooden stand. "That's what's so odd about the whole thing, Mr. Strang," she

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said. "Who'd want the ship, even if he'd solved the problem of getting it out of the bottle? The bottle itself is far more valuable than what was inside it.

"Look here," she went on as Mr. Strang walked up beside her. "See the pontil mark on the base of the bottle. That's where it was broken away from the shaping rod. And there on the neck is an S worked into the glass—Noah Sterner's initial. Each bottle is slightly different from every other one. And it's the differences that make each one valuable."

"But what happened to the ship?" groaned Blore. "And how—and why—was it taken out of the bottle in the first place?"

"If I'm to have any chance of finding that out," said Mr. Strang, shivering slightly, "I've got to have someplace that's warm." He looked at Ruth Quinn and tapped a gnarled finger against his brow. "Cold shrinks the brain cells. It's a well-known fact."

"Perhaps instead of going back to the inn, you'd like to come to my house for tea," said Ruth. "I'd be glad of somebody new to talk to. The townspeople have heard my gossip and I've heard theirs a thousand times. And we'll be properly chaperoned. I live with my father, and I'll apologize for him ahead of time. He's somewhat—well, eccentric."

"He's as crazy as a hoot owl," said Blore. "But Mr. Strang, do you really think you can find out how that ship got out of the bottle?"

The teacher shrugged. "I can only try, Mr. Blore. But at least I'll have something that's more interesting than"—he screwed up his face distastefully—"playing checkers!"

On the way to Ruth Quinn's house Mr. Strang asked if they could stop off to see Chris Wayde. A young giant of a man, Wayde ran the Pixley's Cove Gift Shoppe and spent the off season whittling grizzled seamen and carving sperm whales and clipper ships on bookends, trivets, cutting boards, and other objects for the summer tourist trade.

"There's not much to putting a ship in a bottle," Wayde told the teacher. "It takes more care than knowledge. The trick is to hinge the masts and spars so they all fold down against the deck. There's a thread running from the stern to the top of each mast and from there through a hole in the bowsprit. Once the ship's embedded in its sea of putty, that thread is pulled, and everything comes up into place. The thread's glued to the bowsprit and the excess is cut off with a razor blade on a stick after the glue dries. The work's tedious more than anything else."

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"And how would you go about getting the ship out once it's in there?" Mr. Strang asked.

Wayde scratched his head. "It would be hard," he said, "unless you smashed it to pieces. Even that would be difficult without breaking the bottle itself. Who'd want to do such a thing, anyway?"

The teacher just shook his head. "How much do you charge for something like that? A ship in a bottle, I mean."

"Oh, mebbe twenty-five or thirty dollars. Of course, I tell all my friends that if they'll bring a bottle—full—the two of us will empty it and then I'll do the job for nothing just as soon as I can see well enough to find the neck. One or two of 'em even took me up on it, but it was a losing proposition for me. It takes five or six hours to do a real good job."

A short time later Ruth Quinn and Mr. Strang were back in her old black coupe, basking in the warm blast from the heater. Ruth pulled into the driveway of a gaunt frame house and Mr. Strang marveled at the size of three huge boulders which seemed to be erupting from the snow-covered front yard.

They entered the kitchen through the back door and stamped the snow from their feet. Suddenly a door at the other end of the room burst open, and a man appeared there. He was somewhat older than Mr. Strang, with only a few wisps of iron-gray hair on his head. He wore bedroom slippers and wrinkled wool trousers, but the upper part of his body was clad only in bright red long-armed underwear. In one of the man's fists was a battered cane, brandished like a club.

"Ruth?" the man demanded in a cracked voice, "is that critter with you?"

"Yes, Daddy." She shook her head in amused annoyance. "This is Mr. Strang, and he's our guest."

"How-do, young fella." And Mr. Quinn pumped the teacher's hand vigorously. Mr. Strang was thoroughly charmed. It had been years—decades—since he'd been called "young fella."

Ruth made tea, and she and Mr. Strang sat at the kitchen table to drink it. Mr. Quinn disappeared into the living room where, from the roar of gunshots and the clatter of horses' hoofs, a cowboy movie was playing on television.

"Daddy's always been a little—well, odd," Ruth told the teacher. "And the stroke he had a few years back didn't help any. The winters are hard for him, as he likes to keep occupied, and there's not much to do."

"But in the summers he keeps busy, eh?"

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"Yes," replied Ruth. "His current project is digging a root cellar in the sand bank out behind the house. Of course we have no garden—too many rocks for that—so there's nothing to put into a root cellar if we had one. On the other hand, whenever Daddy digs, the sand keeps running back into the hole, so I expect he'll never get it done. But it keeps him active."

Mr. Strang leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily. The rock of Sisyphus was as nothing compared to trying to dig a hole in shifting sand. "You have a nice house," he said by way of conversation.

Ruth shook her head firmly. "We have a horrid house, Mr. Strang. Why Daddy and I agreed to move out here, I'll never know. The other one was much prettier."

"The other one?"

"Yes. You saw it this morning. The village took it over for the museum. The board gave us this one in exchange, and Artis Blore went on about how it was our civic duty to give up the place so the museum could get started. He also gave me the curator's job to kind of sweeten the deal. But I don't know if we should have agreed."

She sighed deeply. "It's kind of lonely out here, especially for Daddy. In town he could walk to the stores and see all his friends. But now—"

And then she brightened. "But perhaps one of these days we'll do some traveling. I'd like that. I've never been more than a hundred miles from this town in my life. But say, there's no sense burdening you with my troubles. What about the ship? Any ideas about who took it out of the bottle? And how? And why?"

"Not one," was the reply. "I'm far too relaxed for thinking. A warm house on a cold day, pleasant companionship, and a delicious cup of tea—what more can someone my age ask of life?"

It was after one o'clock when Ruth Quinn dropped him back at Ye Chandler's Inne. "Lunch time's over, Leonard!" yelled Hotchkiss from the kitchen. "But you can make your own fixings from what's in the refrigerator if you like."

As the teacher went through the swinging doors into the huge kitchen, he saw his host up to his flour-dusted elbows in the process of making apple pies. "Ten at a time, Eddie?" asked Mr. Strang in surprise.

"Yep. Expecting a few tour buses to stop by here this evening on the way back from the ski slopes. Feed 'em plenty, and they're happy. And when they're happy, they tip well." Hotchkiss plied his rolling

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pin expertly, thinning out the top crusts which would cover the pans filled with apples, sugar, and spices.

"Except for what looks like about fifteen pounds of rolled roast, there's not much here," said Mr. Strang, peering into the depths of the refrigerator.

"Fry yourself an egg," replied Hotchkiss. "There must be a couple left in the carton."

"Just one. And I'll take it. But soft-boiled."

"Suit yourself. The pot's on the rack there, and the egg timer's on the stove."

The teacher brought water to a boil while Hotchkiss flipped the top crusts over his pies with a feather-light touch. Gently Mr. Strang dropped the egg into the boiling water and turned the egg timer over. The tiny particles of sand inside began dropping through its neck.

"One for you." Hotchkiss pricked a little floral design into one of the pie crusts with a fork. "And you." A few flicks of the fork and a bloom and leaves appeared on another crust as if by magic. "And now you."

For a moment Mr. Strang watched in amusement, then he turned back to the egg timer. Steadily the grains of sand tumbled downward.

The perforating of the doughy crusts with the fork—the egg timer—There was something . . . Mr. Strang stared blankly at the wall, deep in thought.

"Leonard?" From somewhere a voice impinged on his consciousness. "Leonard, if you don't get that pot off the stove right quick, it's gonna boil dry. As it is, the egg'll be rock-hard."

"I know," he said softly. "I know how it happened."

"So do I!" snapped Hotchkiss. "You went to sleep at the switch, that's how it happened."

"No, the other thing. The ship, the bottle . . ." And suddenly Mr. Strang was keen and alert. "What time is it, Eddie?" he asked crisply.

"Nearly two. You got plenty of time before—"

"No, I haven't. Where's your phone book? Quick!"

He was able to get in touch with Ruth Quinn immediately and put his request. But Mayor Blore was out, and it took his secretary a few minutes to locate him. Finally the little group met outside the Pixley's Cove museum, just as it had that morning. The single dif-

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ference was that now, at Mr. Strang's insistence, old Mr. Quinn had accompanied his daughter.

Once inside the museum, Mr. Strang saw that Ruth, her father, and Blore were seated comfortably—at least, as comfortably as the chill air permitted. Then, in spite of the cold, Mr. Strang removed his overcoat. In a gesture familiar to thousands of present and former students of Aldershot High School he whipped off his black-rimmed glasses, polished them on his none-too-clean necktie, and stowed them in a jacket pocket. Finally he peered down at the three, now every inch the teacher.

"Do you know, Mr. Strang?" Blore asked eagerly. "Do you know what happened to the ship?"

"Mr. Blore," was the rather imperious reply, "I'm rather pressed for time, as I have to catch a bus in"—Mr. Strang glanced at his watch—"exactly one hour. So please let me handle this in my own way."

Blore sank back in his seat in uncharacteristic silence.

"There are two facets to the problem of the ship which left its bottle," said Mr. Strang, exactly as if speaking to a roomful of teenage students. "One is the disappearance of the ship itself. And the other has to do with the Armell Glass Works. Surprisingly, the two are related."

Ruth Quinn opened her mouth as if to speak, then thought better of it.

"First, the ship," the teacher continued. "The bottle on the stand over there was not broken. Nor were there even the tiniest scraps of wood inside to indicate that the ship was smashed to pieces in order to get it out."

"So it was removed whole!" said Blore spontaneously. "I knew it."

"No, it was not, Mr. Blore. I'm sure of it. For I saw something here this morning whose significance I didn't comprehend until I watched Ed Hotchkiss making indentations in pie crusts at the inn just after lunch."

"What was it, Mr. Strang?" Ruth Quinn asked.

"I saw a piece of putty inside the bottle. It was shaped into waves to look like water."

"It's supposed to look like water," said Blore.

"Yes, but the point is, it isn't water. Take a ship out of water, and the cavity it made will fill up immediately. But take a ship, however small, out of putty, and its cavity remains, showing the depression

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where the hull sat. And yet there is no cavity, no depression, in the putty in the bottle!"

Blore scuttled to where the bottle sat on its stand and examined it closely. "You're right," he said. "But what does that mean, Mr. Strang?"

"Unless we go on the somewhat absurd assumption that, having removed the ship, the thief took the time to remodel the putty into waves, it means that the bottle on that stand is *not* the one the ship was in."

It took some moments for Mr. Strang's last remark to sink in. And then Blore made a sound like a deflating tire. "You mean, you mean there's another Armell bottle? Besides this one?"

"That's exactly what I mean, Mr. Blore. Far from removing the ship from its bottle, our thief took the bottle and all, leaving this one in its place. After all, inserting a little colored putty into a bottle and then tamping it down and shaping it with a long thin stick is simplicity itself, compared with removing a ship under full sail."

"But who did it?" cried Ruth.

"Oh, my dear." Mr. Strang shook his head. "That you should ask such a question. Mayor Blore, I assume this building is secure. That is, nobody can get in when the doors are locked."

"Only by breaking a window or something."

"But no windows were broken. Our thief, therefore, needed a key. And who have keys, Mayor?"

"There are only two. I have one. And Ruth—" Blore spun about to stare at Ruth. "You!" he said, astounded. "You had to be the one who—"

For a moment Ruth Quinn tried to stare him down. Then she turned away, her face reddening and tears springing to her eyes.

"Yes," Mr. Strang went on, "some time between the autumn closing and now you came in here, Ruth, carrying that bottle concealed in a bag or a large purse. With nobody about, it was easy to make the substitution. I suspect the original bottle is at your house right now."

Ruth Quinn sat tight-lipped, gazing straight ahead.

"But why, Ruth?" asked Blore. "Why would you do a thing like that, even if you had an extra bottle?"

The silence was overwhelming. Old Mr. Quinn patted his daughter's hand comfortingly. And then Mr. Strang spoke again.

"Mayor Blore," he said, "you have a way of getting something for nothing. The farm boy who brought you the bottle was persuaded

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to hand it over without recompense. Chris Wayde spent hours putting the ship into the bottle, but you convinced him it was a civic duty. And years ago you talked Ruth and her father into giving up this lovely house in the center of town for a much less suitable place at its edge. You must have a golden tongue, sir."

"Why, thank you, Mr. Strang. I—"

"But perhaps later, once the glow of civic pride had faded, isn't it possible that one or two of your 'contributors' might have felt that, however legal the process by which it was done, you had cheated them?"

"Well, I suppose—"

"And you feel that way right now, don't you, Ruth?"

With a proud toss of her head Ruth Quinn nodded her agreement.

"What it comes down to, Mr. Blore, is that after what you'd done to Ruth and her father, they wanted to make you sweat a little. So Ruth switched bottles. But she made an error."

"I sure did!" snapped Ruth. "If it weren't for Mr. Strang coming here, Artis, you wouldn't have seen that different bottle until next spring when the museum opened. I was sure you'd know in a minute that a substitution had been made. Those bottles are as different as night from day if you know what to look for. But you, you big lummox, just kept insisting it was the same bottle, only with the ship missing. So I had to go along with you or you might have started suspecting me."

"But even if I had realized the change had been made," Blore sputtered. "What then?"

"You might have got to wondering where the other bottle came from," cackled old Mr. Quinn. "Then, after letting you stew in your own juice for a week or so, we'd have told you."

"And where did the other bottle come from?" asked Blore.

"It was found," said Mr. Strang, "exactly where you'd expect such an object to be—on the site of the old Armell Glass Works."

Blore looked as if he'd been hit with a brick. "You—you mean the Quinns found the Armell Works?"

"Yes, they did. Or, more precisely, you and the town fathers presented it to them. And I'd imagine you'll have to pay a pretty penny to get it back, to use your own words. Enough, I'd expect, so that Ruth and her father can take that trip they've been longing for."

"You mean it's out on her property?" Blore asked in a halting voice. "The property the village deeded to her?"

"Correct at last, Mr. Blore."

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"But that was our secret, Daddy's and mine," said Ruth, clasping her father's hand tightly. "How did you find out, Mr. Strang?"

The teacher smiled down at her. "My dear, a second bottle appears mysteriously. Your father spends his spare time digging. And where? In a sand pit. Ruth, it occurs to me that in this boulder-infested area sand is a somewhat rare commodity. Yet it's the one thing that the Armell Works had to have. For sand, remember, is the chief ingredient in the making of glass. Where better to build the works than in the middle of a sand bank?"

Mr. Strang spread his hands wide. "The evidence was too compelling to ignore once I was reminded of it by sand trickling through an egg timer."

"We—that is, Daddy—discovered the works last summer while he was digging his root cellar," said Ruth. "The place must have burned down. All that's left of the structure is some charred beams. But there seems to be brickwork out there, and some huge kettle things and—"

"The original furnaces and crucibles," breathed Blore. "An incredible find!"

"Yes, and if you want them you'll pay through the nose!" snapped Ruth. "Otherwise I'll find somebody else who will."

"But you did steal the bottle, Ruth," said Blore smoothly. "And to avoid prosecution—"

She shook her head. "As curator of the museum, I have the right to store any exhibit wherever I wish. The ship-in-bottle is available whenever it's asked for."

"But Ruth, think of how grateful the whole village would be if you could see your way clear to turn the land over to us for—oh, some nominal fee. We'd have a plaque with your name on it, and—"

"Mr. Blore?" said Ruth in her most ladylike voice.

"Yes, Ruth?"

"Stick it in your ear!"

Mr. Strang put his overcoat on. "And now I have a bus to catch," he announced, flicking his left sleeve to expose his wristwatch. "So I'll be—Drosophila! Ruth! Ruth, I need you!"

"What is it, Mr. Strang?"

"My bus leaves in ten minutes, and I still have to pick up my luggage at the inn. Please give me a lift. If I get stuck here and have to play one more game of checkers with Eddie Hotchkiss, my brain will turn into a mothball. A ride, Ruth! Quick!"

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a *NEW* short story by

JOYCE HARRINGTON

The days of cheap wine and bearded poets and one-course meals of spaghetti in that funny little Greenwich Village house downtown—those days were over. There was no going back to those simpler and happier times—not in these days of a big-important job and an elegant, expensive condominium uptown . . .

ADDRESS UNKNOWN

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

It happened again today.

I couldn't remember my address. Well, that's nothing. Not a serious lapse. It could happen to anyone. Just a minor short circuit in the good old memory bank. Only it's happened several times lately, and each time it happens I feel peculiar afterward.

The first time, I'd been working late and decided to catch a cab home. It was almost ten o'clock when I finally let myself out of the office. The night guard must have been off on his rounds because the reception area was dim and eerie and deserted. The lobby of the huge building was pretty much the same, and I almost despaired of finding a cab before I dragged myself through the revolving doors and out onto the deserted and eerie but well-lit midtown street. But a cab was slowly nosing toward me from the end of the block and I flagged it down with my last ounce of strength. When it stopped, I crawled into its lumpy, foul-smelling back seat, gave the driver the address, and closed my eyes.

We jounced and rattled for a while, stopped and started, swerved and had a few near misses. I didn't open my eyes for any of it. I knew the passing scene well, too well. I was weary, disgruntled, hungry, and bored. All I wanted was to get home and fall into bed, and hope

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that Mitchell had walked the dog and wasn't too put out about my lateness. When I felt the cab pulling over to the curb and the driver said, "Four sixty," I opened my eyes and groped for my handbag. And then I looked out the window.

"But this isn't—I mean, how did we get here?"

Here. Here wasn't home. Not any more. It had been home in the pre-Mitchell days, the pre-big-important-job days, the days of wine and poets and spaghetti and going up on the roof to see the sun rise over Manhattan. Here was a funny little building in Greenwich Village where one room was all I could afford, but it was all I needed then.

"Driver," I muttered, embarrassed. "I made a mistake. I wanted to go to—" And that's when I couldn't remember.

"Four sixty, lady," the driver repeated. "If you want to go somewheres else I'll have to start the meter again. I already shut it off."

"Never mind," I said. I gave him a five-dollar bill and some change and got out.

The street looked the same. The same worn stoops, the same dented garbage cans, the same children's games chalked on the sidewalk. And the same battle-scarred orange tomcat slinking in the shadows. Or his son. Or grandson. How long had it been? Eight years? Nine? The front of the house that had once been home told me nothing. My room had been at the back, its single window overlooking back yards and clotheslines. But I'd had a windowbox full of petunias in the spring, and chives and sweet basil. Now I bought my chives frozen and did without sweet basil. I never cooked spaghetti any more and hadn't seen a petunia in years. Plants didn't seem to thrive in my apartment, our apartment. Maybe it's because there isn't time to talk to them.

I started walking. There were people on the street. There are *always* people on the street in the Village. Young people, casually dressed. Sandals, jeans, loose floppy dresses on tall rangy girls, tight leather trousers on slim young men walking thin nervous dogs. I felt overdressed in my lady-executive crisply tailored summer beige two-piece with my Crouch & Fitzgerald lady's briefcase hanging from its strap on my shoulder.

Around the corner then, more people, more dogs, idling away a summer night, gossiping, laughing, scratching fleas. And the coffee house, the same old coffee house with its wire-backed chairs and marble tables and the fading dingy murals of the last days of Pompeii. I went in and sat at the table, the very table, where I used to

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sit for hours, sipping slow espresso and reading Rilke and Eliot and sometimes Baudelaire.

The waitress was new and young—well, waitresses come and go, don't they, and she didn't know me. She brought me espresso and a cannoli. Pastry had been out of bounds for me for years, but that night I dug into the sweet thick creamy filling and the crisp outer shell as if diets had never been invented. The coffee was strong and thick and black, just the way I liked it. I sipped it slowly. There was plenty to read in my briefcase, none of it poetic, so I read nothing but tried to figure out what had happened.

Obviously I'd given the wrong address to the cab driver. My old address, and he'd faithfully delivered me there. A simple mistake brought on by stress, overwork, and a subconscious yen to return to simpler times. So far, so good. But then, when I tried to give him the correct address—the elegant, expensive condominium apartment where Mitchell was waiting for me—I couldn't for the life of me remember where it was. How about that? Must mean something. But what? Sitting in the coffee house, dawdling over the dregs of my espresso, I knew perfectly well where I lived.

And I'd better get there quick. It was past eleven and Mitchell liked to get to bed no later than eleven thirty on week nights. It was part of his drinking-man's health routine. I considered calling him, but thought better of it. He might be sleeping already, and I didn't want to risk waking him. And I wasn't so very sure that if I picked up a telephone and started to dial, I would remember what number I was calling.

Back on the street a cab found me quickly. I thought it was because I looked so out of place and uptownish. I was home in ten minutes. Mitchell was asleep. Hank, the dog, a young but cagey black mutt from the pound, was pretending to be asleep on the white velvet sofa in the living room. Forbidden territory—he had a huge plaid pillow on the floor in my study, but I let him lie. Sleeping dogs, and all that. I crept into bed beside Mitchell as quietly as I could. He didn't stir.

That was the first time.

There was a second and a third time over the next few weeks. Not quite as jarring as the first time. Simple things really. Like sending out invitations to a cocktail party and coming up blank at the space for the return address. That was easy. I was sitting at my desk in my study at home, and I simply glanced at a piece of mail addressed to me. And shrugged it off. Or making reservations for our trip to

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Ireland in early September. I was at the office on the phone talking to the airline reservation clerk when the blankness struck. I'd had to scrabble in my handbag and finally had the presence of mind to look at my driver's license. The clerk must have thought I was balmy, or trying to hide something.

The vacation trip to Ireland was fine. Well, almost fine. I'd had to fly over to London for a couple of days on business. Despite Mrs. Thatcher, the British aren't quite accustomed to women making international deals, no matter how minor. But that's what I was there for, and that's how come Mitchell and I were vacationing in a stately thatched cottage on the West Coast of Ireland. So that I could be within leaping distance if anything should go wrong.

Mitchell hated Ireland. He said it was damp and boring and there was nothing to do but drink. He really wanted to go to New Zealand and ski. I hate skiing vacations. I never learned how and don't want to, so I get cold and bored and maybe drink a little too much.

The two days in London turned into three. It was about as hot as London ever gets and sticky as flypaper. The gentlemen I was dealing with were very gentlemanly and negotiations moved at a seemly pace. But I sensed a polite perplexity when evening came and it was time to entertain me. Obviously I couldn't be treated as one of the boys. Wives appeared, and they did their best. My answers to their cautious questions seemed to reassure them, somewhat. Yes, I was married. No, I had no children. Yes, my husband had a job, a rather important one in television. (I didn't tell them that Mitchell was an unsuccessful actor who had turned to writing soap operas.) Yes, I enjoyed my work, and no, I didn't find it difficult to be both wife and career woman. (Well, what else could I tell them? That Mitchell had turned silent and sullen lately, and that I was overtired and suffering lapses of memory?)

At last it was over, the papers signed, the celebration dinner eaten, and the telephone call to my boss back in New York made. He virtually assured me that there'd be a promotion and a substantial raise waiting for me when I got back. All I wanted to do was settle down for the next few days in that picturesque cottage by the seashore and read Keats and try to find out what Mitchell was thinking. About us.

Mitchell had brought along his portable typewriter and a ream of paper. His idea was that after five years of writing soaps, it was time he tried something more ambitious. A novel. And as long as we were spending two weeks in Ireland, where there was nothing

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else to do, he might as well get it started. Ireland seemed to inspire a lot of novel-writing. Maybe some of it would rub off.

When I drove the rented car up the lane to the cottage (electrified and plumbed for the convenience of American visitors) in the misty twilight, its windows were dark. I honked the horn, hoping for some help with my luggage. Not that there was a lot of it. One small suitcase and my ever-present briefcase. Nothing I couldn't handle myself, but it would have been nice. The cottage remained dark and quiet.

I got out of the car and pushed open the cottage door.

"Mitchell! I'm back."

No answer. I'd telephoned him twice from London. Once to tell him of the extra day needed to finish the deal, and again from the airport to let him know when I'd be arriving. And I'd hinted that it might be nice if he could somewhere in the village find a bottle of champagne to celebrate my victory. Maybe that's where he'd gone.

I switched on the lights and stood in the doorway, appalled. The place was a mess. The cottage had only two rooms, a large one with a kitchen at one end and a collection of miscellaneous chairs and sofas at the other and a round dining table in the middle, and a smaller one that was our bedroom. Between the two, space had been carved out to accommodate a cranky bathroom. We'd rented the cottage from glowing descriptions furnished by the travel agent; the glow came after a sufficiency of Guinness stout had been swallowed.

And that, from the looks of it, was precisely what had happened. Stout bottles littered the floor, the table, and kitchen sink, the window sills, everywhere I looked. All empty. Among them were scattered the occasional empty whisky bottle, dirty dishes used as ashtrays, wrinkled clothes, and, unaccountably, a goat. A nanny goat I gathered, as she bleated and clopped past me on her way to freedom through the open door. The smell was fierce.

Mitchell had apparently been having a party.

I looked in the bedroom. More of the same, around a tumbled unmade bed. The bathroom showed signs of someone having been sick.

Welcome home, I said to myself. Congratulations and all that. I was tempted to get back in the car and drive until I found a clean hotel with a clean *single* room and have a nice clean bath and get into a freshly made bed. But what about reading Keats in the cool of the evening by a peat fire in a stone fireplace? The stone fireplace

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was there all right, and I began by clearing the stout bottles off its mantel.

An hour later I'd heaped most of the trash into a small mountain behind the house, cleaned the bathroom, and remade the bed. There was no sign of Mitchell. I took a bath, unpacked my suitcase, and sat down in the armchair by the fireplace with Keats in my lap, to wait.

Waiting is hard for me to do. It wasn't always. I can remember days that seemed to have no end while I was waiting for something important to happen to me. I wasn't impatient then. I always knew that there was time enough and important things didn't just come along every day. Mitchell was important. I knew that from the moment I met him.

It was at a party, a different kind of party from the ones I usually went to in those days. These were some friends of my parents who were celebrating the graduation of their son from law school. With honors. The crowd was mixed, both my parents' generation and my own, and I knew the young man slightly from joint attempts by both families to get us interested in each other. We weren't interested but had gone out together a couple of times, just to keep the peace.

That night he was shyly pleased with himself and accepted both the teasing and the congratulations of the guests with solemn grace. We sat together for a while and he told me how hard it had been for him in school but that the grind had been well worth it because now he'd been offered a fine position with a large corporation and the future was dazzling. His salary awed me.

I'd agreed to come to his party out of discontent. He gave me a focus for my malaise. I, too, could go back to school and make the important thing happen for me. I'd spent enough time with bearded poets and cheap wine, waiting for I didn't know what. Then and there I decided to take charge of my life. My parents would be only too glad to help me out, although my mother, I knew, still cherished notions of becoming a young grandmother. Anything would be better than the aimless drifting which was all I had done since leaving college. In the meantime I listened to the fledgling lawyer's modest boasting—he managed the balance quite nicely—and gazed around the room.

When my eyes met the dark ones of the man standing alone at the makeshift bar, I knew. This was important. He was handsome, but not in the pretty sulky way of male models. His hair was dark and flecked with gray at the temples. His face had good bones and

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a few character lines, a nose that was more hawk than sparrow, a wide mouth that smiled at me and showed big, strong, white teeth. He was tall, but not too tall, and looked exactly as you would want your doctor to look. Capable, calm, understanding. He left the bar and began walking toward us.

"Uh-oh," said my friend. "I'm about to lose you. That's Mitchell Sands bearing down on us and he looks like he means business. Be warned. Don't ever call him Mitch. He hates it and has been known to inflict damage on those who dare to use it. He's an actor and crazy and one of my closest friends. I met him on a wilderness survival trip, and he made damn sure I survived."

My friend finished his whispered commentary just as Mitchell Sands arrived at my side.

"Congratulations to the survivor of law school," he said. "Everything you learned on the trail with me, you can put to use in the corporate jungle. I don't believe I know this lady."

I hadn't been called a lady in years. Bearded poets don't go in much for ladyhood these days. Coming from Mitchell on the heels of my new resolve, it sounded just fine. My friend did the introductions and tactfully disappeared. Mitchell and I were inseparable from that moment. He'd had a streak of phenomenal luck, had money in the bank, a brand-new apartment, and a good role in a to-be-filmed-in-New York movie. I told him of my idea of going back to school, probably business school because neither law nor medicine appealed to me, but I'd always been good at math although I'd tried to hide it. He thought the idea was wonderful; he thought *I* was wonderful. We left the party together. We were married three weeks later.

I discovered I had a talent for finance and an unsuspected ability to convince people to see things my way. I zipped through business school as if it were a perpetual Fourth of July picnic. Oh, it was hard work, all right. But I enjoyed every minute of it, especially the competitiveness of my fellow students. *Especially* when I bested everyone, men and women alike, and finished top of my class. But with Mitchell there to encourage me, it had been easy, a piece of cake.

And finding a job had been a piece of cake, too. Women were in, and qualified women were still pretty scarce. I took the best of the offers and settled in to prove that I was worth every cent of the staggering amount of money I was being paid. Mitchell was proud of me. My father openly bragged about me to his cronies. My mother

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looked a little wistful sometimes, but never mentioned grandchildren.

It was about this time that Mitchell's career took a downward turn. It wasn't noticeable at first. Only that there were longer and longer free periods between jobs. Nothing you could really put your finger on. He went to fewer and fewer auditions. His agent began not returning phone calls. He hadn't done television commercials since his early apprentice days, and now he suffered the indignity of being rejected for those.

Finally, after a six-month dry spell, he went on a raging bender with an old buddy and turned up two days later, sick, repentant, and with a temporary job filling in for a soap writer who'd wrecked himself and his car by plowing into the rear end of a disabled milk tank truck. The writer never came back. Mitchell found himself *churning out low-key dialogue and fevered plots, permanently.*

"It could be worse," he said. "I could have gone into the fascinating world of high finance."

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"Nothing. At least I'm still in show business."

"Which is no business."

Which is just about where things fetched up, and still are, between Mitchell and me. We have no problems about money; I make more than enough for the two of us to live well, even luxuriously. Mitchell's pittance from his soap-opera job keeps him well supplied with the flashy clothes he's come to hanker for, and the Scotch whisky and vitamins that get delivered by the case. I've thought about divorce and, I'm sure, so has he. But big corporations tend to be conservative and although divorce is tolerated among the underlings, none of the top men carry such a blot. I just don't know how the company would feel about me as a divorcee. It's too risky right now. Besides, I don't relish the prospect, and it's a real one, of having to pay alimony.

So on we go, Mitchell and I, keeping carefully quiet about most things, still inseparable, taking idyllic vacations in Ireland where maybe, just maybe, given half a chance, we can straighten something out.

I shifted in my chair, the volume of Keats heavy in my lap, and glanced at the clock on the mantel. Two in the morning. And still no Mitchell. I wondered if I ought to be worried. From the look of the cottage when I arrived, he was probably drunk. That happened more and more often lately. And he would sober up with large ap-

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plications of vegetable juice and vitamin pills. There was no vegetable juice in the cottage. I went to bed.

In the morning Mitchell was there, sprawled over more than half of the bed, fully clothed. He smelled of stale beer and tobacco (he didn't smoke) and something sweetish and cloying. In the clean morning light his stylish denims showed grease spots and his hair was full of small burrs. I left him there making sounds somewhere between a snore and a gurgle, and went into the other room to make coffee.

Through the window at the kitchen end of the cottage I saw that our daily help had arrived and was staring at the mountain of trash in the backyard with something approaching awe.

She came in and said, "I don't know who you're going to get to cart *that* away."

Her voice was soft and her words flavored with Ireland. She was a pretty girl with the name of Rose. It suited her fresh pink and blondness, but she was sturdy as well, strong and well-fleshed. Her rosiness could turn blowsy in just a few short years. She looked everywhere in the main room but at me.

"What do you know about this, Rose?"

"Who, me?"

"You were here yesterday, weren't you?"

"Oh, yes, Ma'am. I was here. And I fried a nice fish for his dinner. He likes fried fish."

Her unspoken criticism hung on the air between us like the leftover scent of her cooking. I should have been here frying fish for my man instead of gallivanting all over London.

"He likes nothing of the kind."

"He ate it, then."

Was she smirking? Turning away to hide the sly grin? Or was she just looking over the remaining devastation in the room and planning her day's work?

"This place'll have to be cleaned up," I told her. "It's a mess."

"Oh, yes, Ma'am," she breathed. "Leave 'em alone for a minute and they'll be creating. Pigs, they are."

Her mention of pigs reminded me of the goat that had been my welcoming committee.

"Where did the goat come from?"

"Was there a goat, too?"

Her innocence was impregnable. I didn't believe it for a minute. The coffee was ready and I poured myself a cup. A groan from the

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bedroom came between us. Her eyes flicked to the narrow passage and away again.

"Is he sleeping, then? I'll be quiet."

"Dead to the world. But he'll be up soon, popping vitamins and pretending nothing has happened." I decided on the direct approach. "What *has* happened, Rose?"

"Ma'am?"

"Between you and him. What's been going on?"

"Oh, Ma'am. Nothing, Ma'am. Only he had a party, don't you see."

"Yes, I can see that."

"Oh, everyone was here. It was the best party ever. Devlin the postman sang, and there was fish and sausages for all. I thought my hands was surely going to stick to the frying pan there was so much of it. And they closed up the pub for three days because everyone was doing their drinking here for free. And then they decided they was going to teach him how to milk a goat because he said he didn't know how and he wanted to write something about it in a book or something that he was writing, so Fenella went and got her goat and they did, and I don't know what all else."

Rose was sweeping furiously in the middle of the room, raising more dust than she was collecting, and jabbering all the while. It was a smokescreen. She was hiding something.

"What else, Rose? Where was he last night? Where were you?"

"Oh, Ma'am. Home in my bed. Where else would I be?"

"And where did you get those burrs in your hair?"

Her hand flew to her golden mane tied back with a blue ribbon. And then she blushed and resumed her sweeping with greater fury. The dust cloud made her sneeze.

"You're fired, Rose." I've learned in business to be decisive.

She kept on sweeping.

"Put the broom down, Rose."

Between sneezes she was weeping.

Mitchell staggered out of the bedroom wearing nothing but his red bikini briefs. "Juice!" he howled histrionically. "Cold veggie juice for a dying man!"

"There isn't any. There's nothing to drink but coffee and something in the fridge that looks suspiciously like goat's milk."

He gagged and threw himself across the sofa at the far end of the room. "Noise," he complained. "There's too much noise. You, there, stop whatever it is you're doing and get me my vitamins. And a glass of water if there is any."

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Rose galloped to his side and knelt on the gritty floor, letting her tears splash onto his bare chest. "Oh, mister," she blubbered, "tell her not to give me the sack. You promised. You said I could go back to New York with you and be your housekeeper and have a room of my own and a television and all. You said she wouldn't mind."

"Did I say that?" Mitchell's eyes rolled wildly, indicating disbelief. He really was a terrible actor.

"Oh, you know you did."

"Well, I was wrong. Now be a good girl and get me those vitamins before I perish."

Rose lumbered to her feet. She wiped her flaming face on the corner of her apron and struggled for dignity.

"That I won't," she declared. "I've been a fool before the whole village, but so have you. They ate your food and they drank your whisky well enough, but they all think you're daft and a poor excuse for a man, letting your wife run off to London like that alone. I quit. It's a shame on me to work for people like you, making such an uproar in a nice cottage like this."

She swept out the front door, kicking aside a stray stout bottle as she went. Mitchell cringed on the sofa, wrapping his arms around his head and drawing his knees up to his chest. Rose poked her head in at the window.

"I'll be sending my brother around for my money."

Then, with a sniff, she was gone.

The rest of our vacation was quiet enough. An aged crone came in to keep the place tidy and boil strange messes for our meals. Mitchell opened his ream of paper and set up his portable typewriter in a shady spot behind the house. I took long solitary walks during which I thought a great deal, and sometimes sat on a rock by the sea and read poetry. It didn't help. My thoughts were dreary, and poets had lost their power to heal.

We came together in the evenings, speaking only of commonplace things. Mitchell never mentioned his novel, although I couldn't help but notice that the level of clean paper didn't change much from day to day. And I didn't tell him what I was thinking; he didn't need to know any of that. Yet. Neither one of us spoke of the Rose episode. We went to bed early, and slept. For the first time in years I wasn't tired when I woke up in the morning.

Soon it was all over. I wasn't sorry. Long walks and long-dead poets are all very well, but I was eager to get back to the daily fray. Then, too, all my thinking had led to a conclusion, one that I could

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only put into effect in New York. I wasn't going to risk divorcing Mitchell, but I wasn't going to live with him any longer either. I would find him a small inexpensive apartment, pay the rent on it for a year, and wish him well. Surely a year would be long enough for him to finish his novel, even while writing soap operas, and after that he could certainly manage on his own. It would be cheaper than paying alimony.

My raise and promotion were waiting for me as promised, with an added surprise. A big, newly decorated corner office with my name on the door. From one of its windows I could see the building where I lived, where soon I would live alone. Not a chance of my ever forgetting my address again, I thought.

But Mitchell refused to leave. I thought he would leap at the chance. He could have all the Roses and Daisies and Violets he wanted and I would never know or care.

"Why should I?" he said. "I'm really quite comfortable here. Why should I settle for some dingy box in a crummy part of town? But if it'll make you feel better, we can have separate bedrooms. I'm sure we can squeeze a divan or something into your study. Then you can take your work to bed with you."

Stalemate. I couldn't force him to leave, and I wasn't about to give up the master bedroom which I'd furnished with such loving care exactly the way I wanted it. And now he knew I'd really rather not have him around.

But still we didn't talk about it. What was there to say?

One day I came home early. This happened so rarely, it was almost unthinkable. But I'd eaten something at lunch that violently disagreed with me. It was grim being sick in the ladies' room with all the secretaries finding excuses to come in and offer sympathy. As soon as I could totter, I left them to their whispers and conjectures. One of them went so far as to suggest I might be pregnant. She'd be looking for a new job soon.

The apartment was empty, except for Hank snoozing on the sofa. I put him out on the terrace where he pressed his nose against the glass and whined for the walk he felt entitled to. I knew I should lie down, but I felt restless and angry with myself. Sickness was not part of my game plan. I'd heard enough coarse jokes about women and their frailties, and I'd sworn never to give anyone the least bit of ammunition to use against me in that way.

I roamed the apartment, looking for something to take my mind off my troubles. There was nothing in the way of light reading,

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daytime television (especially Mitchell's soap opera) was puerile, music, no matter how soothing, was liable to worsen the headache that had set in after the stomach had settled down. Idly I poked my head into the small room off the kitchen where Mitchell spent his evenings supposedly writing his novel.

To my great surprise a stack of typed manuscript pages lay on the table next to his typewriter. A fairly respectable stack. I picked it up and flipped through it. It was neatly typed. I glanced at the title page. It read: THE BITCH WIFE. A Novel by Mitchell Sands.

So that's the way it was, I thought. Well, we'll just see about that. I took the manuscript into the bedroom and propped myself up on two pillows and read. It was good. It was bitingly true, achingly sad, and (I almost couldn't believe it) very well-written. And while it wasn't *precisely* about me, there was enough in it to make the world wonder.

I don't think I overestimated. The book would sell. Not just sell, it would be a bestseller. Mitchell would appear on television talk shows, looking handsome and dignified, and he would talk about the book, and me. There would be a movie; I would be played, bitchily, by a big Hollywood star. Secretaries would read the paperback on the subway and whisper about me behind my back. And the Chairman of the Board of my company would say nothing. He would know and he would deal with this unwelcome notoriety, but he would say absolutely nothing at all about it to me. I couldn't let that happen.

I didn't bother to read the whole thing. I didn't have to. And there wasn't time. Mitchell would be home soon. I got up and went into the living room. Hank was still out on the terrace, howling faintly through the glass. There was an arrangement of dried grasses screening the fireplace. I moved it aside and sat down on the slate hearth. Methodically I crumpled the pages of the manuscript and tossed them into the clean mouth of the fireplace. It was a little like throwing away a part of my life that had never had a chance to happen. And, of course, I realized what I was doing to Mitchell. He would probably never recover from this. But which one of us had a better right to survive? There was no question in my mind about that.

At last all the pages had been crumpled and stuffed into the fireplace. It made quite a mound. The long-stemmed fireplace matches were kept in a decorative box on a shelf nearby. I got up, opened the box, and drew out a single match. It was about ten inches long. My

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mind tried to play silly games with me. If the match ignited on the first strike, I would set fire to the manuscript. If not, I wouldn't. Nonsense! First strike, or fiftieth, the manuscript would burn. Even if I had to rub two sticks together to get it started.

They were good quality, expensive matches. Flame leaped from the tip at the first scrape against the fine sandpaper on the side of the matchbox. I knelt before the fireplace and touched the flaming wand there and there and there. And once again for good measure.

It didn't take long. There was an explosion of fire that scorched my face and made me draw back in alarm. But it quickly subsided and within five minutes there was nothing left but a smoldering pile of frail ashes. Not a word, not a scrap, and not a chance that he would ever be able to reconstruct it. Not Mitchell.

I got up and poured myself two inches of Mitchell's whisky and sat in the armchair to sip it and watch the ashes cool.

Mitchell came in about an inch later.

"You're home early," he said. "What's the occasion?"

"Nothing. I wasn't feeling well."

"What is it? Bubonic plague? Typhoid? Nothing less could topple superperson from the executive suite so early in the day."

I took another sip of Scotch. "About your book, Mitchell."

"Yes? What about it?" He was standing in the hall about to move away to the bedroom or to that awful little room behind the kitchen.

"I burned it."

"Ha-ha!"

"I really did. Look."

He came into the living room and looked at the ashes.

"Is that it?"

I nodded.

"I ought to kill you," he said, his voice low.

I nodded. Idle threats have absolutely no effect on me. In business you have to learn quickly who the real sharks are, and which big talkers you can safely ignore. Hank had begun scratching at the glass door, in a frenzy to say hello to Mitchell. I got up and crossed the wide expanse of deep-piled white carpet. When I slid the door open, Hank barreled in woofing his head off, leaping and prancing and making a fool of himself. For some reason he adored Mitchell. I went out onto the terrace to avoid having to witness the display of doggy devotion.

I wasn't prepared for the shove, but some instinct made me grip the railing just in time. My drink went sailing off into space, twenty-

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two floors above the sidewalk. Mitchell was right behind me with a look on his face that I had never seen before. Maybe I'd underestimated him. I twisted away from the railing and got myself on the other side of a heavy metal-framed chair. Mitchell came after me.

"You bitch," he breathed, low and angry. "You're worse than anything I ever imagined. You're not fit to live."

"Stay back," I warned him. And picked up the chair. I felt ridiculous, like one of those lion-taming acts in the circus.

He stalked me around the terrace, that look of hate and rage and desperation growing more and more intense. I thrust the chair at him a couple of times, but I was afraid he would grab its legs and wrench it away from me. And it was growing heavy. I couldn't keep it between us much longer.

Hank thought it was some kind of game. He yipped and loped in circles around us. A moment came when I knew I had to do something. The dog was between us. I was just in front of the terrace door. Mitchell had his back to the railing. I threw the chair at him. The dog leaped to intercept it. Both chair and dog hit Mitchell at the same moment. He fell backward. And over. The dog looked goofily surprised and then began running back and forth, whimpering.

I decided to take him for a walk.

I've answered all their questions now. Except the ones I can't answer because I don't remember. They've taken Hank away. At first I thought they'd stopped me because I didn't clean up after him, but I guess policemen have more important things to think about. Especially in Central Park at midnight. I don't remember walking to the park, but I must have because that's where they picked me up.

I only got into the police car because I was tired and wanted to go home, but I couldn't seem to remember where that was. I wish they'd stop asking me.

"Q"

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a story about Ukridge by

P. G. WODEHOUSE

On October 15, 1981, the Trustees of The Pierpont Morgan Library in New York opened an exhibition of the manuscripts, books, articles, plays, and songs of P. G. Wodehouse, celebrating the centenary of the author's birth. Coinciding with the celebration was publication of several books about and by P. G. Wodehouse, including WODEHOUSE ON CRIME, A Dozen Tales of Fiendish Cunning *(published by Ticknor & Fields), edited and with a Preface by D. R. Bensen and with a Foreword by Isaac Asimov.*

The following tale is one of the dozen from that "rollicking" and "hilarious" collection. It features Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge and rollicks with what Dr. Asimov calls "the lovable criminality of P. G. Wodehouse" . . .

UKRIDGE STARTS A BANK ACCOUNT

by P. G. WODEHOUSE

Except that he was quite well dressed and plainly prosperous, the man a yard or two ahead of me as I walked along Piccadilly looked exactly like my old friend Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge, and I was musing on these odd resemblances and speculating idly as to what my little world would be like if there were two of him in it when he stopped to peer into a tobacconist's window and I saw that it was Ukridge. It was months since I had seen that battered man of wrath and though my guardian angel whispered to

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me that it would mean parting with a loan of five or even ten shillings if I made my presence known, I tapped him on the shoulder.

Usually if you tap Ukridge on the shoulder, he leaps at least six inches into the air, a guilty conscience making him feel that the worst has happened and his sins have found him out, but now he merely beamed, as if being tapped by me had made his day.

"Corky, old horse!" he cried. "The very man I wanted to see. Come in here while I buy one of those cigarette lighters, and then you must have a bit of lunch with me. And when I say lunch, I don't mean the cup of coffee and roll and butter to which you are accustomed but something more on the lines of a Babylonian orgy."

We went into the shop and he paid for the lighter from a wallet stuffed with currency.

"And now," he said, "that lunch of which I was speaking. The Ritz is handy."

It was perhaps tactless of me, but when we had seated ourselves and he had ordered spaciously I started to probe the mystery of this affluence of his. It occurred to me that he might have gone to live again with his aunt, the wealthy novelist, Miss Julia Ukridge, and I asked him if this was so. He said it was not.

"Then where did you get all that money?"

"Honest work, laddie, or anyway I thought it was honest when I took it on. The pay was good. Ten pounds a week and no expenses, for of course Percy attended to the household bills. Everything I got was velvet."

"Who was Percy?"

My employer, Ukridge explained, and the job with which he entrusted me was selling antique furniture. It came about through my meeting Stout, my aunt's butler, in a pub, and the advice I would give to every young man starting life is always go into pubs, for you never know whether there won't be someone there who can do you a bit of good. For some minutes after entering the place I had been using all my eloquence and persuasiveness to induce Flossie, the barmaid, to chalk my refreshment up on the slate, my finances at the time being at a rather low ebb. It wasn't easy. I had to extend all my powers. But I won through at last, and I was returning to my seat with a well filled flagon when a bloke accosted me and with some surprise I saw it was my Aunt Julia's major domo.

"Hullo," I said. "Why aren't you butling?"

It appeared that he no longer held office. Aunt Julia had given

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him the sack. This occasioned me no astonishment, for she is a confirmed sacker. You will probably recall that she has bunged me out of the home not once but many times. So I just said "Tough luck," or something to that effect, and we chatted on this and that. He asked me where I was living now, and I told him, and after a pleasant quarter of an hour we parted, he to go and see his brother, or that's where he said he was going, I to trickle round to the Foreign Office and try to touch George Tupper for a couple of quid, which I was fortunately able to do, he luckily happening to be in amiable mood. Sometimes when you approach Tuppy for a small loan you find him all agitated because mysterious veiled women have been pinching his secret treaties, and on such occasions it is difficult to bend him to your will.

With this addition to my resources I was in a position to pay my landlady the trifling sum I owed her, so when she looked in on me that night as I sat smoking my pipe and wishing I could somehow accumulate a bit of working capital I met her eye without a tremor.

But she had not come to talk finance. She said there was a gentleman downstairs who wanted to see me, and I confess this gave me pause. What with the present worldwide shortage of money—affecting us all these days—I had been compelled to let one or two bills run up, and this might well be some creditor whom it would have been embarrassing to meet.

"What sort of man is he?" I asked, and she said he was husky in the voice, which didn't get me much further, and when she added that she had told him I was in I said she had better send him up, and a few moments later in came a bloke who might have been Stout's brother. Which was as it should have been, for that was what he turned out to be.

"Evening," he said, and I could see why Mrs. Whatever-her-name-was had described him as husky. His voice was hoarse and muffled. Laryngitis or something, I thought.

"Name of Stout," he proceeded. "I think you know my brother Horace."

"Good Lord!" I said. "Is his name Horace?"

"That's right. And mine's Percy."

"Are you a butler, too?"

"Silver-ring bookie. Or was."

"You've retired?"

"For a while. Lost my voice calling the odds. And that brings me to what I've come about."

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It was a strange story he had to relate. It seemed that a client of his had let his obligations pile up—a thing I've often wished bookies would let me do—till he owed this Percy a pretty considerable sum, and finally he had settled by handing over a lot of antique furniture. The stuff being no good to Percy, he was anxious to dispose of it if the price was right, and the way to make the price right, he felt, was to enlist the services of someone of persuasive eloquence—someone with the gift of the gab was the way he put it—to sell it for him. Because, of course, he couldn't do it himself, his bronchial chords having turned blue on him. And his brother Horace, having heard me in action, was convinced that they need seek no further. Any man, Horace said, who could persuade Flossie to give credit for two pints of mild and bitter was the man for Percy. He knew Flossie to be a girl of steel and iron, adamant to the most impassioned pleas, and he said that if he hadn't heard it with his own ears, he wouldn't have believed it possible.

"So how about it," Percy asked.

Well, you know me, Corky. First and foremost the level-headed man of business. What, I inquired, was there in it for me, and he said he would give me a commission. I said that I would prefer a salary, and when he suggested five pounds a week with board and lodging thrown in, it was all I could do to keep from jumping at it, for, as I told you, my financial position was not good. But I managed to sneer loftily, and in the end I got him up to ten.

"You say board and lodging," I said. "Where do I board and lodge?"

That, he said, was the most attractive part of the assignment. He wasn't going to take a shop in the metropolis but planned to exhibit his wares in a cottage equipped with honeysuckle, roses, and all the fittings down in Kent. One followed his train of thought. Motorists would be passing to and fro in droves and the betting was that at least some of them, seeing the notice on the front gate—ANTIQUE FURNITURE FOR SALE. GENUINE PERIOD. GUARANTEED. —would stop off and buy. My Aunt Julia is an aficionado of old furniture and I knew that she had often picked up some good stuff at these wayside emporia. The thing looked to me like a snip and he said he thought so, too. For mark you, Corky, though you and I wouldn't be seen dead in a ditch with the average antique, there are squads of halfwits who value them highly—showing, I often say, that it takes all sorts to make a world. I told myself that this was going to be good. I slapped him on the back. He slapped me on the back. I shook his hand. He shook my hand. And—what made the

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whole thing a real love feast—he slipped me an advance of five quid. And the following afternoon found me at Rosemary Cottage in the neighborhood of Tunbridge Wells, all eagerness to get my nose down to it.

My rosy expectations were fulfilled. For solid comfort there is nothing to beat a jolly bachelor establishment. Women have their merits, of course, but if you are to live the good life you don't want them around the home. They are always telling you to wipe your boots and they don't like you dining in your shirtsleeves. At Rosemary Cottage we were hampered by none of these restrictions. Liberty Hall about sums it up.

We were a happy little community. Percy had a fund of good stories garnered from his years on the turf, while Horace, though less effervescent as a conversationalist, played the harmonica with considerable skill, a thing I didn't know butlers ever did. The other member of our group was a substantial character named Erb, who was attached to Percy in the capacity of what is called a minder. In case the term is new to you, it meant that if you owed Percy a fiver on the two o'clock at Plumpton and didn't brass up pretty quick, you got Erb on the back of your neck. He was one of those strong silent men who don't speak till they're spoken to, and not often then, but he was fortunately able to play a fair game of bridge, so we had a four for after supper. Erb was vice-president in charge of the cooking, and I never wish to bite better pork chops than the ones he used to serve up. They melted in the mouth.

Yes, it was an idyllic life, and we lived it to the full. The only thing that cast a shadow was the fact that business might have been brisker. I sold a few of the ghastly objects, but twice I let promising prospects get away from me and this made me uneasy. I didn't want to get Percy thinking that in entrusting the selling end of the business to me he might have picked the wrong man. With a colossal sum like ten quid a week at stake it behooved me to do some quick thinking, and it wasn't long before I spotted where the trouble lay. My patter lacked the professional note.

You know how it is when you're buying old furniture. You expect the fellow who's selling it to weigh in with a lot of abstruse stuff which doesn't mean a damn thing to you but which you know ought to be there. It's much the same as when you're buying a car. If you aren't handed plenty of applesauce about springs and cam shafts

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and differential gears and sprockets, you suspect a trap and tell the chap you'll think it over and let him know.

And fortunately I was in a position to correct this flaw in my technique without difficulty. Aunt Julia had shelves of books about old furniture which I could borrow and bone up on, thus acquiring the necessary double talk, so next morning I set out for The Cedars, Wimbledon Common, full of zeal and the will to win.

I was sorry to be informed by Horace's successor on my arrival that she was in bed with a nasty cold, but he took my name up and came back to say that she could give me five minutes—not longer, because she was expecting the doctor. So I went up and found her sniffing eucalyptus and sneezing a good deal, plainly in rather poor shape. But her sufferings had not impaired her spirit, for the first thing she said to me was that she wouldn't give me a penny, and I was pained to see that that matter of the ormolu clock still rankled. What ormolu clock? Oh, just one which, needing a bit of capital at the time, I pinched from one of the spare rooms, little thinking that its absence would ever be noticed. I hastened to disabuse her of the idea that I had come in the hope of making a touch, and the strain that had threatened to mar the conversation became eased.

"Though I did come to borrow something, Aunt Julia," I said. "Do you mind if I take two or three books of yours about antique furniture? I'll return them shortly."

She sneezed skeptically.

"Or pawn them," she said. "Since when have you been interested in antique furniture?"

"I'm selling it."

"You're *selling* it?" she exclaimed like an echo in the Swiss mountains. "Do you mean you are working in a shop?"

"Well, not exactly a shop. We conduct our business at a cottage—Rosemary Cottage, to be exact—on the roadside not far from Tunbridge Wells. In this way we catch the motoring trade. The actual selling is in my hands and so far I've done pretty well, but I have not been altogether satisfied with my work. I feel I need more technical stuff, and last night it occurred to me that if I read a few of your books I'd be able to make my salestalk more convincing. So if you will allow me to take a selection from your library—"

She sneezed again, but this time more amiably. She said that if I was really doing some genuine work she would certainly be delighted to help me, adding in rather poor taste, I thought, that it was about time I stopped messing about and wasting my life as I

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had been doing. I could have told her, of course, that there is not a moment of the day, except possibly when relaxing over a mild and bitter at the pub, when I am not pondering some vast scheme which will bring me wealth and power, but it didn't seem humane to argue with a woman suffering from a nasty cold.

"Tomorrow, if I am well enough," she said, "I will come and see your stock myself."

"Will you really? That'll be fine."

"Or perhaps the day after tomorrow. But it's an extraordinary coincidence that you should be selling antique furniture, because—"

"Yes, it was odd that I should have happened to run into Stout."

"Stout? You mean my butler?"

"Your late butler. He gave me to understand that you had sacked him."

She sneezed grimly.

"I certainly did. Let me tell you what happened."

"No, let me tell *you* what happened," I said, and I related the circumstances of my meeting with Horace, prudently changing the pub to a milk bar. "I had been having an argument with a fellow at the next table," I concluded, "and my eloquence so impressed him that he asked me if I would come down to Rosemary Cottage and sell this antique furniture. He has a brother who recently acquired a lot of it."

"What!"

She sat up in bed, her eyes, though watery, flashing with all the old fire. It was plain that she was about to say something of significance, but before she could speak the door opened and the medicine man appeared, and thinking they were best alone I pushed off and got the books and legged it for the great open spaces.

There was a telephone booth at the end of the road, and I went to it and rang up Percy. These long-distance calls run into money, but I felt that he ought to have the good news without delay, no matter what the expense.

It was Horace who answered the phone, and I slipped him the tidings of great joy.

"I've just been seeing my aunt," I said.

"Oh?" he said.

"She's got a nasty cold," I said.

"Ah," he said, and I seemed to detect a note of gratification in his voice, as if he was thinking well of Heaven for having given her a

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sharp lesson which would teach her to be more careful in future how she went about giving good men the bum's rush.

"But she thinks she'll be all right tomorrow," I said, "and the moment the sniffles have ceased and the temperature has returned to normal she's coming down here to inspect our stock. I don't need to tell you what this means. Next to her novels what she loves most in this world is old furniture. It is to her what catnip is to a cat. Confront her with some chair on which nobody could sit with any comfort, and provided it was made by Chippendale, if I've got the name right, the sky's the limit. She's quite likely to buy everything we've got, paying a prince's ransom for each article. I've been with her to sales and with my own eyes have observed her flinging the cash about like a drunken sailor. I know what you're thinking, of course. You feel that after what has passed between you it will be painful for you to meet her again, but you must clench your teeth and stick it like a man. We're all working for the good of the show, so— Hullo? Hullo? Are you there?"

He wasn't. He had hung up. Mysterious, I thought, and most disappointing to one who, like myself, had been expecting paeans of joy. However, I was much too bucked to worry about the peculiar behavior of butlers, and feeling that the occasion called for something in the nature of a celebration I went to the Foreign Office, gave George Tupper his two quid back, and took him out to lunch.

It wasn't a very animated lunch, because Tupper hardly said a word. He seemed dazed. I've noticed the same thing before in fellows to whom I've repaid a small loan. They get a sort of stunned look, as if they had passed through some great spiritual experience. Odd. But it took more than a silent Tuppy to damp my jocund mood, and I was feeling on top of my form when an hour or two later I crossed the threshold of Rosemary Cottage.

"Yoo-hoo!" I cried. "I'm back."

I expected shouts of welcome—not, of course, from Erb, but certainly from Horace and Percy. Instead of which, complete silence reigned. They might all have gone for a walk, but that didn't seem likely, because while Percy sometimes enjoyed a little exercise Horace and Erb hadn't set a foot outdoors since we'd been there. And it was as I stood puzzling over this that I noticed that except for a single table—piecrust tables the things are called—all the furniture had gone, too. I don't mind telling you, Corky, that it baffled me. I could make nothing of it, and I was still making nothing of it when I had that feeling you get sometimes that you are not alone, and,

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turning, I saw that I had company. Standing beside me was a policeman.

There have been times, I will not conceal it from you, when such a spectacle would have chilled me to the marrow, for you never know what may not ensue once the Force starts popping up, and it just shows how crystal clear my conscience was that I didn't quail but greeted him with a cheery "Good evening, officer."

"Good evening, sir," he responded courteously. "Is this Rosemary Cottage?"

"Nothing but. Anything I can do for you?"

"I've come on behalf of Miss Julia Ukridge."

It seemed strange to me that Aunt Julia should have dealings with the police, but aunts notoriously do the weirdest things, so I received the information with a polite "Oh, really?"—adding that she was linked to me by ties of blood, being indeed the sister of my late father, and he said "Was that so?" and expressed the opinion that it was a small world, a sentiment in which I concurred.

"She was talking of looking me up here," I said.

"So I understood, sir. But she was unable to come herself, so she sent her maid with the list. She has a nasty cold."

"Probably caught it from my aunt."

"Sir?"

"You said the maid had a nasty cold."

"No, sir, it's Miss Ukridge who has the nasty cold."

"Ah, now we have got it straight. What did she send the maid for?"

"To bring us the list of the purloined objects."

I don't know how it is with you, Corky, but the moment anyone starts talking about purloined objects in my presence I get an uneasy feeling. It was with not a little gooseflesh running down my spine that I gazed at the officer.

"Purloined objects?"

"A number of valuable pieces of furniture. Antiques they call them."

"Oh, my aunt!"

"Yes, sir, they were her property. They were removed from her residence on Wimbledon Common during her absence. She states that she had gone to Brussels to attend one of these conferences where writers assemble, she being a writer, I understand, and she left her butler in charge of the house. When she came back, the valuable pieces of antique furniture weren't there. The butler, ques-

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tioned, stated that he had taken the afternoon off and gone to the dog races and nobody was more surprised than himself when he returned and found the objects had been purloined. He was dismissed, of course, but that didn't help Miss Ukridge's bereavement much. Just locking the stable door after the milk has been spilt, as you might say. And there till this morning the matter rested. But this morning, on information received, the lady was led to suspect that the purloined objects were in this Rosemary Cottage, and she got in touch with the local police, who got in touch with us. She thinks, you see, that the butler did it. Worked in with an accomplice, I mean to say, and the two of them got away with the purloined objects, no doubt in a plain van."

I believe I once asked you, Corky, if during a political discussion in a pub you had ever suddenly been punched on the nose, and if I remember rightly you replied in the negative. But I have been—twice—and on each occasion I was conscious of feeling dazed and stunned, like George Tupper when I paid him back the two quid he had lent me and took him to lunch. The illusion that the roof had fallen in and landed on top of my head was extraordinarily vivid. Drinking the constable in with a horrified gaze, I seemed to be looking at two constables, both doing the shimmy.

For his words had removed the scales from my eyes, and I saw Horace and Percy no longer as pleasant business associates but as what they were, a wolf in butler's clothing and a bookie who did not know the difference between right and wrong. Yes, yes, as you say, I have sometimes been compelled by circumstances to pinch an occasional trifle like a clock from my aunt, but there is a sharp line drawn between swiping a clock and getting away with a houseful of assorted antique furniture. No doubt they had done it precisely as the constable had said, and it must have been absurdly simple. Nothing to it. No, Corky, you are wrong. I do *not* wish I had thought of it myself. I would have scorned such an action, even though knowing the stuff was fully insured and my aunt would be far better off without it.

"The only thing is," the officer was proceeding, "I don't see any antique furniture here. There's that table, but it's not on the list. And if there had been antique furniture here, you'd have noticed it. Looks to me as if they'd sent me to the wrong place," he said, and with a word of regret that I had been troubled he mounted his bicycle and pedaled off.

He left me, as you can readily imagine, with my mind in a turmoil,

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and you are probably thinking that what was giving me dark circles under the eyes was the discovery that I had been lured by a specious bookie into selling hot furniture and so rendering myself liable to a sharp sentence as an accessory or whatever they call it, but it wasn't. That was bad enough, but what was worse was the realization that my employer had gone off owing me six weeks' salary. You see, when we had made that gentleman's agreement of ours, he had said that if it was all the same to me he would prefer to pay me in a lump sum at the end of my term of office instead of week by week, and I had seen no objection. Foolish of me, of course. I cannot impress it on you too strongly, Corky old horse, that if anyone comes offering you money, you should grab it at once and not assent to any suggestion of payment at some later date. Only so can you be certain of trousering the stuff.

So, as I say, I stood there draining the bitter cup, and while I was thus engaged a car stopped in the road outside and a man came up the garden path.

He was a tall man with gray hair and a funny sort of twist to his mouth, as if he had just swallowed a bad oyster and was wishing he hadn't.

"I see you advertise antique furniture," he said. "Where do you keep it?"

I was about to tell him it had all gone when he spotted the piecrust table.

"This looks a nice piece," he said, and as he spoke I saw in his eye the unmistakable antique-furniture-collector's gleam which I had so often seen in my Aunt Julia's at sales, and I quivered from hair to shoe sole.

You have often commented on my lightning brain and ready resource, Corky—well, if it wasn't you, it was somebody else—and I don't suppose I've ever thought quicker than I did then. In a sort of blinding flash it came to me that if I could sell Percy's piecrust table for what he owed me the thing would be a stand-off and my position stabilized.

"You bet it's a nice piece," I said and proceeded to give him the works. I was inspired. I doubt if I have ever, not even when pleading with Flossie that credit was the lifeblood of commerce, talked more persuasively. The golden words simply flowed out, and I could see that I had got him going. It seemed but a moment before he had produced his checkbook and was writing me a check for sixty pounds.

"Who shall I make it out to?" he asked, and I said S. F. Ukridge,

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and he did so and told me where to send the table—somewhere in the Mayfair district of London—and we parted on cordial terms.

And not ten minutes after he had driven off, who should show up but Percy. Yes, Percy in person, the last bloke I had expected to see. I don't think I described him to you, did I, but his general appearance was that of a clean-shaven Santa Claus, and he was looking now more like Santa Claus than ever. Bubbling over with good will and *joie de vivre*. He couldn't have been chirpier if he had just seen the heavily backed favorite in the big race stub its toe on a fence and come a purler.

"Hullo, cocky," he said. "So you got back."

Well, you might suppose that after what I had heard from the rozzer I would have started right away to reproach him for his criminal activities and to urge him to give his better self a chance to guide him, but I didn't—partly because it's never any use trying to jerk a bookie's better self to the surface but principally because I wanted to lose no time in putting our financial affairs on a sound basis. First things first has always been my motto.

"You!" I said. "I thought you had skipped."

Have you ever seen a bookie cut to the quick? I hadn't till then. He took it big. There's a word my aunt is fond of using in her novels when the hero has said the wrong thing to the heroine and made her hot under the collar. She—what is it?—"bridled," that's the word I mean. Percy bridled.

"Who, me?" he said. "Without paying you your money? What do you think I am—dishonest?"

I apologized. I said that naturally when I returned and found him gone and all the furniture removed it had started a train of thought.

"Well, I had to get the stuff away before your aunt arrived, didn't I? How much do I owe you? Sixty quid, isn't it? Here you are," he said, pulling out a wallet the size of an elephant. "What's that you've got there?"

And I'm blowed if in my emotion at seeing him again I hadn't forgotten all about the twisted-lip man's check. I endorsed it with a hasty fountain pen and pushed it across. He eyed it with some surprise.

"What's this?"

I may have smirked a bit, for I was not a little proud of my recent triumph of salesmanship.

"I just sold the piecrust table to a man who came by in a car."

"Good boy," said Percy. "I knew I hadn't made a mistake in making

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you vice-president in charge of sales. I've had that table on my hands for months. Took it for a bad debt. How much did you get for it?" He looked at the check. "Sixty quid? Splendid. I only got forty."

"Eh?"

"From the chap I sold it to this morning."

"You sold it to somebody this morning?"

"That's right."

"Then which of them gets it?"

"Why, your chap, of course. He paid more. We've got to do the honest thing."

"And you'll give your chap his money back?"

"Now don't be silly," said Percy, and would probably have gone on to reproach me further, but at this moment we had another visitor, a gaunt, lean, spectacled popper-in who looked as if he might be a professor or something on that order.

"I see you advertise antique furniture," he said. "I would like to look at—Ah," he said, spotting the table. He nuzzled it a good deal and turned it upside down and once or twice looked as if he were going to smell it.

"Beautiful," he said. "A lovely bit of work."

"You can have it for eighty quid," said Percy.

The professor smiled one of those gentle smiles.

"I fear it is hardly worth that. When I called it beautiful and lovely, I was alluding to Tansy's workmanship. Ike Tansy, possibly the finest forger of old furniture we have today. At a glance I would say that this was an example of his middle period."

Percy blew a few bubbles.

"You mean it's a fake? But I was told—"

"Whatever you were told, your informant was mistaken. And may I add that if you persist in this policy of yours of advertising and selling forgeries as genuine antiques, you are liable to come into uncomfortable contact with the law. It would be wise to remove that notice you have at your gate. Good evening, gentlemen, good evening."

He left behind him what you might call a strained silence, broken after a moment or so by Percy saying, "Cor!"

"This calls for thought," he said. "We've sold that table."

"Yes."

"Twice."

"Yes."

"And got the money for it."

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"Yes."

"And it's a fake."

"Yes."

"And we passed it off as genuine."

"Yes."

"And it seems there's a law against that."

"Yes."

"We'd better go to the pub and talk it over."

"Yes."

"You be walking on. There's something I want to attend to in the kitchen. By the way, got any matches? I've used all mine."

I gave him a box and strolled on, deep in thought, and presently he joined me, seeming deep in thought, too. We sat on a stile, both of us plunged in meditation, and then he suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"What a lovely sunset," he said, "and how peculiar that the sun's setting in the east. I've never known it to do that before. Why, strike me pink, I believe the cottage is on fire."

And, Corky, he was perfectly accurate. It was.

Ukridge broke off his narrative, reached for his wallet, and laid it on the table preparatory to summoning the waiter to bring the bill. I ventured a question.

"The cottage was reduced to ashes?"

"It was."

"The piecrust table, too?"

"Yes, I think it must have burned briskly."

"A bit of luck for you."

"Very fortunate. Very fortunate."

"Percy was probably careless with those matches."

"One feels he must have been. But he certainly brought about the happy ending. Percy's happy. He's made a good thing out of it. I'm happy. I've made a good thing out of it, too. Aunt Julia has the insurance money, so she also is happy, provided of course that her nasty cold has now yielded to treatment. I doubt if the insurance blokes are happy, but we must always remember that the more cash these insurance firms get taken off them, the better it is for them. It makes them more spiritual."

"How about the two owners of the table?"

"Oh, they've probably forgotten the whole thing by now. Money means nothing to fellows like that. The fellow I sold it to was driving

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a Rolls Royce. So looking on the episode from the broad viewpoint—I beg your pardon?"

"I said 'Good afternoon, Mr. Ukridge,' " said the man who had suddenly appeared at our table, and I saw Ukridge's jaw fall like an express lift going down. And I wasn't surprised, for this was a tall man with gray hair and a curiously twisted mouth. His eyes, as they bored into Ukridge, were bleak.

"I've been looking for you for a long time and hoping to meet you again. I'll trouble you for sixty pounds."

"I haven't got sixty pounds."

"Spent some of it, eh? Then let's see what you *have* got," said the man, turning the contents of the wallet out on the tablecloth and counting it in an efficient manner. "Fifty-eight pounds, six and threepence. That's near enough."

"But who's going to pay for my lunch?"

"Ah, that we shall never know," said the man.

But I knew, and it was with a heavy heart that I reached in my hip pocket for the thin little bundle of pound notes which I had been hoping would last me for another week.

CRIMINALIMERICK

A FINE MESS YOU'VE GOT US INTO THIS TIME, STANLEY

by D. R. BENSEN

I could easily go round the bend,
Or my life seek out methods to end—
Were there two, five, or ten o' me,
I'd not need an enemy
So long as I called Ukridge friend.

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Lyle Arbuckle had known Wilfred Welkin at college, where he was an odious little sneak with a theory that into each life some dirt must fall . . . As delightful a spoof as we have chuckled over in a year of 13 months . . .

DEATH WARMED OVER

by CHARLES PETERSON

To Worthington Beamish, duly elected and regularly re-elected coroner of Norchester County, accepted with quivering hands the glass offered him by Denise Welkin. He raised his eyes upward—up toward the master bedroom where Wilfred Welkin lay in his white-on-white silk pajamas, a bullet hole in his forehead, a green silk scarf knotted tightly around his throat, a stab wound in his chest, the odor of bitter almonds about his lips, and, in a glass beside the bed, enough strychnine to fell an elephant.

Mr. Beamish shuddered, closed his eyes, and drained the glass at a gulp. Then he gave a quick shiver and sat up with the air of one to whom Duty is a sacred, if demanding, trust.

"Thank you," he said, returning the glass to Denise. She smiled at his look of gratitude—an attractive blonde woman in her early thirties with blue-green eyes and a regal air. "I feel much better now. It gave me quite a turn, seeing Mr. Welkin in such—such exceptionally dead condition."

The tall, lean dark-haired man with streaks of grey at his temples, who had been introduced as Lyle Arbuckle, looked up from his magazine. "I should think you'd be used to that sort of thing."

"Oh, dear, no! Ordinarily, I let Dr. MacFarlane handle the dirty w— that is to say," the coroner amended, with a horrified glance at Denise, "the technical details. And if he says somebody's dead, I generally agree with him. Or else the sheriff takes over. But the sheriff's off at a convention and MacFarlane was busy at the hospital, and meanwhile there's this fool of a law that says the coroner must personally certify, et cetera. I wish," he concluded gloomily, "Cousin Herbert had mentioned *that* when he gave me this job, years ago."

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"Would that be Herbert Beamish, the state party chairman?" inquired the improbably handsome young man seated next to Denise, holding her hand. His name was Harlan Swift, and Mr. Beamish recalled seeing it in connection with some Broadway show—one that had just ended a long and successful run.

The coroner nodded. "I called him as soon as I got the news, and he said in view of Mr. Welkin's prominence I'd better haul my—I mean, come at once."

"You needn't have rushed," said Denise. "We barely had time to finish breakfast as it was. But as long as you're here, what's next?"

It was a question Mr. Beamish would gladly have put off. He felt, not for the first time this morning, a vague sense that he was entering very deep waters indeed. Nothing had gone exactly as it was supposed to from the time he'd picked up the phone to hear a cultured voice identifying itself as that of Mr. Welkin's valet, Peavey, informing him that Mr. Welkin appeared to be dead and suggesting that Mr. Beamish might wish to drop around when convenient.

The name of Wilfred Welkin was one to upset anyone who valued good public relations, since he was the publisher of *X-Pose,* the nation's gamiest magazine of sin, scandal, and sex, specializing in scuttling the careers of the great and near-great. So, disregarding the valet's injunction, Mr. Beamish had sped to the Welkin estate with siren and flasher, only to have to wait in the drawing room until everyone had finished eating.

No one seemed the least anxious to get the show on the road. Mrs. Welkin offered coffee. Mr. Arbuckle offered a tour of the rose garden. Mr. Swift offered cigarets. There were two other guests: a short, rotund man with thinning hair and a rumpled look as though he'd been slept in, who offered nothing but his name—Elmo Mooney—and an astonishingly constructed girl with hair the color of silver dollars, whose name was Angela Field. And everything she had to offer seemed in imminent peril of exploding right out of the shorts-and-halter outfit she wore, but after learning that no newspaper photographers accompanied Mr. Beamish she subsided into a reverie that was, if somewhat petulant, undeniably scenic.

Then there was the trip upstairs and the appalling discovery that Wilfred Welkin was not only dead but apparently dispatched with comprehensive care. Mr. Beamish had occasionally encountered multiple deaths before, when unavoidable in the pursuit of his duties, but never so concentrated in one individual. He really needed that drink when he came back downstairs.

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The gathering there included Peavey, who stood beside the double doors leading to the foyer with a satisfied smile on his lips, his eyes focused somewhere in the middle distance. Periodically, Mr. Beamish would turn and find him missing, and a moment later there he was again, smile a bit wider, eyes peering still farther afield, wispy white hair slightly more unmanageable. Had it not been quite so early in the morning, Mr. Beamish would have said that Peavey was drunk.

"Well, Mr. Beamish?" Lyle Arbuckle prompted.

The coroner hurriedly reeled in his wandering thoughts. "A shocking thing! You may rest assured we'll leave no stone unturned to apprehend the perpetrator of this outrage!"

Angela Field stirred and opened her eyes wide. "Why?"

"What do you mean 'why'?" asked the coroner, nettled.

"I think what Miss Field means," said Harlan, "is that the only reason we can think of for finding the murderer is to give him some kind of commendation—possibly a certificate from the board of sanitation. You couldn't spit into a crowd of any size without hitting someone who'd like to see Wilfred dead. In fact, just before you arrived we were wondering among ourselves which of us *didn't* hate him enough to kill him."

"I don't understand you." Mr. Beamish passed a hand over his brow.

"Well, there were five methods used, but there are six of us—"

"Six? Are you including Mr. Welkin's valet as a suspect?"

Peavey looked aggrieved. "I inshisht! I've got my rights!"

"After all, he found the body," said Denise. "And was the last person to see Wilfred alive, last night."

"I could've snoggered 'im jus's well as anybody," the valet said loftily. "Maybe even better!"

"Did you?" Mr. Beamish asked.

Peavey's expression turned unhappy. "No."

The coroner sighed. "We won't know what really killed Mr. Welkin until Dr. MacFarlane finishes his autopsy anyway, so we may as well try to establish the sequence of events. Now, what happened after Peavey found the body?"

"He told me and I told the others," said Denise. "Then we all trooped upstairs to check and figure out what to do. I remarked that Wilfred was looking poorly—not himself at all—and Lyle said it was understandable, since he'd evidently had a fairly wild night and, besides, death changes a person's appearance. Then Peavey sug-

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gested you ought to be called, and Harlan asked if there were any relatives to be notified—"

"Are there?"

"Wilfred once mentioned a brother, but he reportedly vanished in Tibet years and years ago. I said I didn't know how to send a message to Tibet, and Harlan said you started with a responsible yak and—"

"Please!" said the coroner. "Do get on."

"That was about it. Elmo said something about the newspapers getting hold of this, and Angela got all excited and said she wanted to change into something more suitable . . ."

"And then we all went back to breakfast," Arbuckle concluded.

"Back to breakfast?" cried the coroner. "After learning that your host had been murdered?"

"No need to let it spoil the whole weekend, old man," said Arbuckle, a shade of reproach in his tone.

The coroner giggled a trifle hysterically. "Of course not!"

"Another drink, Mr. Beamish?"

"Just a small—no, perhaps I'd better not." He stood up, took out notebook and pencil, and gave Denise a determined look. "Now then! You claim your late husband had enemies?"

"He collected them," said Denise, "the way some people collect matchbook covers. A new group with every issue of his magazine. But if you ask me, Mr. Beamish, you're on the wrong track entirely. I'm certain my husband committed suicide."

The coroner snapped the point of his pencil.

"Surely you've heard of all those libel suits filed against *X-Pose*? Over seven million dollars' worth up to last Thursday. Obviously Wilfred couldn't face them—so he killed himself."

"Five different ways?"

Denise shrugged. "He was always very thorough."

For a moment the coroner looked wistful, as if he'd like to accept the idea. Then he shook his head firmly. "It won't do, Mrs. Welkin! And I find it hard to accept the theory of enemies, since he was killed in his own home, among his friends."

"Mr. Beamish," Arbuckle interposed, "there are a couple of things you should know. First, Wilfred Welkin had no friends. I knew him in college, where he was an odious little sneak with a theory that into each life some dirt must fall, and that he ought to know what it was in order to make something out of it. Nobody paid any attention to him until he inherited enough money to begin printing his slimy scandals, but now you find half the population waiting

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avidly for its monthly lesson in license. The other half are people Wilfred had the goods on—ourselves included—all of whom would have bought tickets to see him drawn and quartered. The second thing is, with one exception, none of us had ever met until this weekend. We've been wondering, rather, why he chose to bring us together."

"That's true," said Harlan. He put his arm around Denise. "We're the exception Lyle refers to. We've loved each other for years, but Wilfred would never agree to a divorce—probably because it might have made Denise happy—and she couldn't file because he had a story about me and threatened to print it if she did. (If you're looking for motives, Mr. Beamish, there are a couple of good ones!) I only responded to his invitation because I wanted to see Denise once more before I left—I'm taking a couple months of vacation at a place I own in South America. As for the rest of this party, I know little more about them than you do."

"You know our names," said Arbuckle. "I am executive vice-president of the Caribe Cruise and Export Lines, of New York."

"I work for the State Department in Washington," said Elmo Mooney. "Passports."

Angela stretched and yawned, putting a severe strain on her halter. "I'm a model."

"And the late Mr. Welkin held some embarrassing secret about each of you?" asked the coroner.

They nodded, and Arbuckle said, "I hope you won't mind if we don't choose to unburden ourselves further at the moment."

There was a tap at the door, where a sheriff's deputy stood holding a cardboard box. He showed it to the coroner, saying, "These turned up in the search, sir. No fingerprints on any of 'em." He displayed them one by one. "This is a target pistol from the shooting range in the rec room downstairs. Fired recently. It was in Mrs. Welkin's dressing table. The scarf around the deceased's neck is monogrammed with Miss Field's initials. This bottle of cyanide was in Mr. Arbuckle's suitcase—"

"Here now!" said Arbuckle, in surprise. "I emptied that case completely when I unpacked!"

"The bottle of strychnine was in Mr. Mooney's shaving kit, and this ice-pick, which appears to have traces of blood on it, was found in the butler's pantry."

"Nothing in my room?" asked Harlan. "Write that down, Mr. Beamish. It looks very suspicious to me!"

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Before the coroner could reply, the front-door chime sounded and a moment later there appeared a compactly-built man of middle height with unruly brown hair. He was dressed in rough tweeds, carried a black bag, and wore pince-nez, over which he peered at the group.

"Dr. MacFarlane!" said Mr. Beamish.

"Greetings, Worthington," said the doctor. "Thought you'd like to hear the autopsy results." He sat down and fished out a gnarled black briar which he stoked and lighted. "Very curious situation. Of course, the lack of cyanosis indicated at once that the scarf could be eliminated as a cause of death. It was tied around Welkin's neck afterwards. Similarly, there was no sign of hemorrhage at either the stab or bullet wound. They, too, were made after death."

"So it was poison!" said Mr. Beamish. "I suspected it all along!"

"So it would seem," said the doctor. "However, analysis of stomach contents showed no trace of cyanide or strychnine—or anything, indeed, more lethal than a light supper."

"Then what—?"

"Brace yourself, Worthington," Dr. MacFarlane said. "Wilfred Welkin died of a heart attack."

The coroner leaped as though harpooned. "Heart attack!" he yelped.

"Hate to break up a jolly little murder case, but there it is—with no doubt whatever. Welkin's pump blew a gasket."

Mr. Beamish's eyes took on a glazed look. "But—but the bullet—and the ice-pick—and—"

"Ah," said the doctor, "now you wander into the realm of the psychotic. Judging from the fill-in your man gave me, any or all of these folks might have done that, though I would guess the deeds were done by one individual, of a vindictive turn of mind. But there you are, Worthington! If you care to pursue this murky matter further, you may nail someone on a charge of corpse-mutilation, but not on a murder charge, or my name ain't young Dr. Kildare. I bid you good day."

When the smokescreen lifted, the doctor was gone and Mr. Beamish was left staring at the vacated atmosphere. "Good heavens!" he groaned. "What will Cousin Herbert say?"

"I fail to see your problem, Mr. Beamish," said Lyle Arbuckle. "Things could hardly have worked out better for you."

"Better?" the coroner repeated, aghast. "I can't make head or tail out of any of this—and you say things couldn't be better?"

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"Certainly; look at the facts. Here you are, a modest county coroner faced with the baffling death of a prominent publisher. But, unimpressed by a mass of confusing and contradictory clues, you pierce directly to the heart of the matter—and prove he died a natural death! Dr. MacFarlane has sworn to it. What need is there to stir up the newspapers—or Cousin Herbert—with trivial details?"

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Beamish's face broke into a smile. "You're absolutely right! The case is closed, isn't it?"

"You mean there won't be any photographers?" Angela pouted.

Arbuckle patted her hand. "There, there, my dear. You'll have other opportunities to display your talents, I'm sure."

The coroner shook hands all around and, humming a carefree tune, all but skipped out the door. He seemed to have shed several years in a matter of minutes. A moment later the people remaining in the drawing room heard the sound of his automobile starting and moving down the driveway. Then all was silent.

"What fools we've been!" Arbuckle exploded.

Startled eyes turned toward him.

"Don't you see?" he demanded. "The moment MacFarlane mentioned Wilfred's light dinner . . ."

"My God, you're right!" cried Harlan. "Wilfred ate a particularly *heavy* dinner last night. Someone even made a comment about where he was stowing it all!"

"I still don't understand," said Denise.

"You really spotted it before any of us, when you said Wilfred looked different somehow—and we all dismissed it. He looked different, my darling, because *that wasn't Wilfred*!"

"Congratulations!" said a new voice. Everyone whirled to face the library door, and Angela screamed, "Wilfred!"

Wilfred Welkin bowed, showing rodent-like teeth in a humorless smirk. "How pleasant it is," he said, in a voice like a fingernail on a blackboard, "to see once more the friends I thought I'd left behind. I understand you met my poor brother Wilmot this morning."

"Is he the one who vanished in Tibet?" Mooney asked.

"The same. Like you, I was astonished at his resemblance to me, when he suddenly turned up last night after you'd all retired. After years of climbing mountains and eating yak butter, he looked no healthier than I do after years among the fleshpots. So much for clean living.

"I assume your modest intelligences have begun to fathom my

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little plan," Wilfred went on. "The oddly-assorted talents here should have tipped you off. An official in a steamship line—who once smuggled far more dangerous cargo than a simple publisher. A ham with his own private smokehouse in Brazil. A man whose vocation is passports—and whose avocation was once the forging thereof. And," he inclined his head toward Angela, "a plaything to while away a lonely exile—though I admit I was having some second thoughts about that extremely low-pressure intellect of yours, my love."

"If you were going to skip the country," said Harlan, in a tight, angry voice, "why didn't you just go—without all this nonsense about a faked murder?"

"Because, my barn-theater Romeo, Wilmot's arrival dropped a better plan into my lap. He wanted me to finance his retirement to a nursing home. Knew about his heart, you see. Unhappily, it failed to survive the joy of our reunion, but he left a perfectly good passport I can use to better advantage than a forged one, while I have amassed"—he held up an attaché case—"enough cash here and in Brazilian banks to keep me for many years. It's a pity my plaintiffs—or you, my dear Denise—will find so few assets left to divide.

"So now," he concluded, in triumph, "I don't need any of you! With the cloud of suspicion surrounding Wilmot's death—thanks to me—none of you will ever convince the authorities that Wilfred Welkin is living at ease in South America! A few moments to remove some traveling accessories I couldn't very well take last night and I shall be gone. And with me"—he patted the attaché case—"documentary evidence of your assorted peccadilloes, in case I ever run short of funds. Goodbye—and be damned to all of you!"

A white-lipped, grim-faced sextet heard his cackling laughter float down the stairs—and drew together around the table where the coroner had left the cardboard box full of murder clues.

T. Worthington Beamish, duly elected and regularly re-elected coroner of Norchester County, sat on the edge of a drawing-room chair, hands clasped between his knees, eyes staring fixedly out at the garden, now awash with the orange hues of sunset. Every so often he rocked a little. Lyle Arbuckle leaned over and tapped his knee as Denise, Angela, Harlan, Elmo, and Peavey watched anxiously.

"You understand our position, Mr. Beamish?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, yes. Certainly."

"We knew the authorities had to be told."

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"Of course!" Mr. Beamish frowned vaguely. "Have to tell the authorities every blasted thing, don't you?"

"So when we recalled the capable way you conducted today's investigation, we naturally turned to you again," said Denise.

Mr. Beamish managed a weak smile.

"Besides," cooed Angela, stroking his hair, "we wouldn't want you getting in trouble with Cousin Herbert—having to rake up that other matter."

Mr. Beamish shuddered.

"Then you think our idea is sound?" Elmo Mooney asked.

Mr. Beamish mopped his forehead, swallowed—and nodded.

"We thought we might put him in the copse behind the rock garden," said Harlan. "Peavey says it's very secluded, owing to the steady encroachment of poison ivy."

"Rather fitting, don't you think?" said Arbuckle.

"Fine, fine!" said Mr. Beamish. He giggled in a distraught way.

"I'll get the shovels, sir." Peavey hastened off, and everyone else rose to carry out his part of the plan.

Everyone except the coroner. Left alone, he raised his eyes to the ceiling—up toward the master bedroom where, impossibly, a second Wilfred Welkin lay in his white-on-white pajamas—a bullet hole in his forehead, a stab wound in his chest, a green silk scarf knotted around his throat, the odor of bitter almonds about his lips, and, in a glass beside the bed, enough strychnine to fell an elephant.

DETECTIVERSE

LITERARY VEIN

by G. STERLING LEIBY

About the books the library lends,
I make this observation:
The mysteries with blood and pulse
Are tops in circulation.

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"It wasn't like that with Harry. It was a grim pursuit" . . .

GOLF NUT

by WADE H. MOSBY

Despite all you see on TV on Sunday afternoons, golf is just a game, and a simple one at that. You get a set of clubs and chase a little white ball around the grass, and finally hit it into a little hole in the ground.

But some people get carried away. Golf becomes an obsession, a testing of oneself. Action equals reaction, and the most reaction comes from striking the ball squarely, making it travel the intended direction and distance.

It should be an enjoyable game, just that and nothing more, but it wasn't like that with Harry. It was a grim pursuit, and when he was out on the links his concentration was almost maniacal. Although he seemed to be outgoing and pleasant in the clubhouse, he became distant and uncommunicative on the course.

I certainly had no objections to that, on the occasions I played with Harry. Part of the enjoyment of golf is being out in the fresh air and sunshine.

When I'm playing I feel alive and invigorated, and I'm happy not to be disturbed by the small talk and insincere "Nice shots!" of other golfers. For me, it's an unwinding. My work involves listening to other people's problems. And their problems can become my problems if I don't remain detached, objective. It sounds cold and clinical, but it's a fact of life if you're going to survive emotionally. You listen and you observe, and most of the time you keep your judgments to yourself.

If I were placed under oath, I might be tempted to say that Harry had a psychopathic personality, that he was paranoid. That might be hard for the layman to grasp, since Harry normally fitted into social situations very well. But that's the way it was with Harry. On the first tee he would become withdrawn, remote. Other golfers talked about Harry's great concentration. I would agree that it was

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remarkable, but privately I could see a man suddenly gone antisocial, aggressive, compulsive.

His swing told you a lot about Harry. The backswing was far too fast, and his downswing was an explosive hack. Strangely enough, although he seemed to do everything wrong, Harry hit a long ball and usually scored well. Despite all the lessons I had taken since Harry suggested that I take up golf, I could never keep up with Harry, and had to bargain with him before every game on how many strokes he should give me.

We always played as a twosome, but we seldom were within talking distance, except on the tees and greens, because Harry rode an electric cart. To me, walking is a part of the game, and I carried my clubs. But even when I accepted his frequent invitations to ride with him, I wouldn't hear a word out of Harry, except for his inventive profanity when he topped a shot or sliced into the woods.

Harry drove his cart like an Indy contender. Candidly, I was afraid to ride with him. He had wrecked two carts on Suicide Hill, on the sixth hole, driving them at top speed and missing the bridge over the gulley. Nobody knows how he escaped unscratched both times.

I had been seeing Harry twice a week for one-hour sessions. Psychotherapy has a long way to go—I'll be the first to concede that—and Harry didn't communicate as well as I had hoped that he might. And then there were times when Harry babbled on about transference and seeing one's own personality defects in others. He could let it all hang out if he wanted to. But most of the time I had to do the talking. It was Harry's suggestion that we combine golf with one of the sessions, so I joined him at his club every Thursday afternoon.

My wife thought it was a great idea, and commented that I was losing what she called my "pool-hall pallor." She liked Harry, and Harry often told me that Flo was a wonderful woman and would be a great partner in any marriage.

I must admit, it took me a long time to realize that Harry was more interested in Flo than he should have been. I was aware that he called her from time to time, and could only guess what else might have been going on. Knowing how explosive Harry could be, I told Flo not to get too involved, but she only laughed off the warning.

Then there was the night Flo was beaten up. She wouldn't talk about it, but I knew who had done it. I called Harry and asked if he could come at once. He was there in ten minutes. Flo wouldn't look

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at him, wouldn't talk. It was Harry who actually calmed me down! He helped with ice packs and bandages, and suggested that we talk about it on the golf course the next day.

We walked to the first tee markers together, and I watched as he went through that amazing change from an outgoing, seemingly understanding human to a calculating bundle of raging intensity. I marveled that he could play so well, knowing that in addition to his now familiar personality change, he had to be preparing an explanation for the night before. I knew that I would have to keep a close eye on him.

There was no conversation until the sixth hole. Then Harry stopped his cart at the top of Suicide Hill and waited for me.

"Want to talk about it now?" I asked when I reached the cart.

"I think it's about time we put it out in the open," he said. "You have been beating Flo long enough. I can't help you. I'm going to have to go to the police."

I saw his right hand take a tighter grip on his 3-iron. I was carrying a sand wedge, since I had hooked into a trap across the ravine.

I sensed sudden, great danger, and I struck Harry's head with the wedge. Blood spurted, and he fell back in the cart. I looked around. No one was in sight. I drove the cart to the edge of the hill near the bridge, then jumped out. One extra shove and the cart plunged downhill, into the jagged, slashing rocks at the bottom. Goodbye, Harry. Goodbye, stupid, two-a-week therapy sessions.

I don't worry about Flo. I can keep her in line the same way I have been since long before I went to Harry about it. Looking back, though, Harry taught me a lot. He was one hell of a psychiatrist.

People still talk about Harry's final "accident" now and then at my bar and grill downtown. And I tell them that I knew Harry very well. A lot better than he knew me.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Library Cop story by

JAMES HOLDING

Once more into the breach with Hal Johnson, collector of overdue library books, whose last thought as his car is forced off the Wolf Hollow Bridge is of Ellen Thomas, the girl at the checkout desk at the library whose hand he has been seeking in marriage lo, these many months . . .

SIDESWIPE

by JAMES HOLDING

As my car struck broadside against the low curb and, already beginning to roll, slammed across the bridge's walkway and crashed through the flimsy steel railing, my most intense emotion was one of raw anger rather than fear.

Not that I'm a particularly fearless character, or too slow of mind to recognize instantly the imminence of my own death. No, what caused my outrage was simply a long-standing pet abomination of mine—it had marked my years as policeman and civilian alike—for anybody, young or old, man or woman, who drove a car while under the influence of alcohol or drugs and blithely played Russian roulette with other people's lives.

I took a flashing lopsided look through my tilted windshield at the car that had forced me off the bridge and through the railing. And I suspected at once that whoever was driving it was either drunk or high or both, because the car showed no sign of stopping. It was drawing rapidly away at speed.

Then I was too busy for further thought about the departing car. My own old Ford, carrying shards of steel railing with it, was falling rapidly, end over end, toward the river thirty feet below. I thanked God fervently for my seatbelt. It held me sturdily in place, kept me

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oriented enough to permit me to do the little things that might possibly save me from drowning—roll up my driver's window to the top, unlock both front doors, and pray a bit. The prayer was only a quickie, of course, but I hoped it might help a little. I also thought fleetingly of Ellen Thomas, the girl on the checkout desk at the library, whose hand I had been vainly seeking in marriage for lo, these many months.

Then the car hit the water with a resounding splash and slowly, inexorably carried me with it beneath the surface.

I called Lieutenant Randall, my old boss at Homicide, from the hospital early the next day. "Lieutenant," I asked querulously, "did you hear what happened to me yesterday?"

"Yeah, Hal, I heard." Randall's voice was as gruff as usual. "Somebody forced you off the Wolf Hollow Bridge, right? And you made it to shore okay. So congratulations. You should be dead."

"I know it," I said. "But thanks, anyway."

"What were you doing on Wolf Hollow Bridge, for God's sake? Nobody uses it any more except a few farmers."

"I was going to collect some books from a farmer's wife out at Dell Corners," I said, "and it was a farmer who found me beside the road when I crawled out of the river, so don't knock it."

"You always did make friends easy. What do you want from me?"

"I want that SOB who sideswiped me on the bridge and left the scene of the accident. I want to find out who's responsible for my bath. And for the total loss of my car. And for the destruction of the forty-two library books that were in the trunk when we went overboard."

Randall said, "You and your library books. You're a little confused, aren't you? Hit-and-run, leaving the scene, DWI—you don't want me, you want Traffic. Aside from that, how you feeling?"

"I got a knot on my head, a sprained thumb, and a cracked rib. But the doctor says I can leave here today if I promise not to breathe deep and don't go bowling for a while."

"Great," said Randall. "Get lots of rest. And hold on. I'll switch you to Traffic."

"Wait a minute! That guy could have killed me!"

"You *aren't* dead, though, are you? So it's none of my business."

There was a click in my ear and a new voice said, "Traffic. Sergeant O'Rourke."

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I said, "Jerry, let me talk to Lieutenant Henderson. This is Hal Johnson." I knew Jerry from the old days.

"Hey, Hal, we heard you got dunked. You okay?"

"Yeah," I said, "but boiling mad. I hope Henderson can find my H-and-R driver for me. I'd like to say a few choice words to him. Is Henderson there?"

"Hold on."

Henderson came on the wire. "How you doing, Hal?"

I said, "Okay, Lieutenant. But I'm mad as hell. Will you please find out for me who the joker was who ran me off Wolf Hollow Bridge yesterday?"

"I wish I could," said Henderson regretfully. "There's not much chance, though, with no witnesses and nowhere to start."

"Listen," I said, "I'm going to *give* you a place to start. I saw the license number of the car that knocked me off the bridge."

"Oho!" Henderson sounded suddenly cheerful. "Let's have it then, Hal. Maybe we can get you some raw beef for dinner after all."

They were just gathering up the breakfast trays at the hospital when Henderson called back. "Hal?"

"Quick work, Lieutenant. Any luck?"

"Not much. I'm sorry. The car that sideswiped you is registered to a man named Frank Shoemaker at 818 Northway Road, Apartment #3."

"Frank Shoemaker, 818 Northway Road, Apartment #3. I got it. Thanks, Lieutenant." I felt my anger beginning to build anew. "Did you take him in?"

"No. Shoemaker reported his car stolen from the Haas Brothers parking lot downtown at twelve noon yesterday. Shoemaker's on the Haas security staff. Cruiser 23 found his car abandoned in the East End at 6:30 this morning. With the right side pretty well bashed in."

"Hell's bells!" I said, seething. "Just my luck! I'm forced off a bridge and nearly killed by a drunken thief who'll get away with it scot free—and the next time he gets high and feels like a joyride in a stolen car he'll go right out and endanger the lives of other innocent citizens!" I tried to calm down, contain my fury.

"Look at it this way," said Henderson. "You're still in one piece, Hal. And that ain't bad for starters. So take it easy. I'll see you around."

They released me from the hospital about eleven o'clock. I took

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a taxi to the rent-a-car office nearest the library. There I rented a Chevy Citation to get me around on my collection routes until the Ford was either dragged out of the river and repaired or declared a total loss and replaced by the insurance company. Meanwhile, my insurance covered the rental of the Chevy, which helped. Library detectives like me, who track down stolen and overdue books for the public library, aren't the highest paid people in the world, and I needed all the money I could muster if I was ever going to set up housekeeping with Ellen Thomas.

If. She hadn't said yes yet, but I thought she was weakening a little. Why else would she have telephoned twice after she found out I was in the hospital and sounded so pleased when I assured her I was still my usual handsome, carefree self with no arms or legs in splints and no bandages around my head?

I drove my rented car to the library, reported in to the Director, and picked up the overdue-books list from my office. Then I went about my business as usual, trying to ignore the occasional sharp pain from the cracked rib and the throbbing of the sprained thumb.

About three in the afternoon I made a call at an apartment just around the corner from Haas Brothers Department Store and it occurred to me that as long as I was in the neighborhood I'd go and have a little chat with Frank Shoemaker.

Leaving the Chevy—locked up tight—in the parking lot, I went into the store and asked at the Information Desk where I could find Shoemaker of the security staff.

The pretty blonde at the desk said, "He's around somewhere. I saw him only a few minutes ago. Try back toward the book department. That way," she pointed. "Do you know him?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, you can recognize him by his hair and mustache," she said. "They're almost pure white. And his skin is almost black right now, he's so tanned. He's just back from a Florida vacation."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll have a look."

I headed for the book department, keeping a sharp eye out for a man with white hair and mustache and a tan. I was only halfway there when the possible significance of the girl's words struck me. I'm sure the clerks at the nearby perfume counter must have thought I had experienced a sudden revelation of some sort, like St. Paul on the road to Damascus or something, because I stopped dead in my tracks and stood stock still in the middle of the aisle while busy shoppers side-stepped around me.

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When at length I got moving again and located Shoemaker at the jewelry counter, I inspected him carefully and decided I wouldn't speak to him after all. At least for now.

An hour later I was facing Lieutenant Randall across his cluttered desk. "It wasn't hit-and-run," I said, "and it wasn't DWI, and it wasn't leaving the scene of an accident, Lieutenant. It was attempted murder. And that *is* your department."

Randall kept his cat-yellow eyes on me without blinking. "What makes you think so?"

"Mostly a hunch—with a few bits of evidence to back it up. Want to hear?"

He nodded.

"Okay. I got this sudden idea that somebody had been trying to kill me only an hour ago. I dropped into Haas Brothers to see the guy who owns the car that knocked me off the bridge yesterday."

"Fellow named Shoemaker, right?" said Randall. "But he wasn't driving when you were pushed," Peterson said.

I was touched. That meant Randall had been interested enough in my welfare to follow up Traffic's investigation. I said, "What started me thinking was that Shoemaker has a heavy Florida tan."

Randall gave me a kind of look you give people who have lost their minds. "A tan."

"Yeah, Lieutenant, a tan." And I told him about Mrs. Radcliffe.

She had been the fifth name on my list—Mrs. John H. Radcliffe, 1272 Highland Drive, North Side. She had, according to my records, six books from the public library that were three weeks' overdue. She hadn't paid any attention to our written notice and she hadn't answered the telephone the two or three times I called her. So I went there, hoping to retrieve the books and collect the fines due on them.

It turned out to be a boxy white clapboard house in the middle of a row of seven others exactly like it, each separated from its neighbor by a narrow gravel driveway leading back, I assumed, to a garage at the rear.

I parked the Ford in front of 1272, went up the porch steps, and rang the doorbell. No answer. After waiting a few moments, I rang again. Still no answer.

After a moment's thought, I went and rang the doorbell of the house to the left. A plump lady in a dressing gown and flat bedroom

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slippers answered my ring at once. She had pink plastic curlers in her hair.

"Yes?" she said.

"I'm looking for the lady next door," I replied. "Mrs. Radcliffe. I've been trying to reach her for two weeks."

"What do you want with her? Who are you?"

"I'm from the public library," I explained. I showed her my ID card. "Mrs. Radcliffe has some overdue books I'm supposed to collect."

"In that case I can tell you why you haven't been able to reach her. She and her husband have been in Florida for three weeks. They just got home last night."

I had a suspicion this sharp-eyed lady was aware of most of what went on with her neighbors, so I asked, "Do you happen to know where she or her husband are now? I'd like to get in touch with one of them."

She nodded complacently. "Her husband left for work at eight this morning as usual. And Dora went marketing over an hour ago."

"Well, maybe I can stop by later this afternoon."

"She ought to be home any minute. She goes to the supermarket around the corner."

"In that case, I'll wait a while. Thank you very much, Mrs.—"

"Jones. And you're welcome." She closed her door.

I went back to the car and crawled inside. The day was cold enough to see your breath, but I was quite comfortable inside the car.

After perhaps fifteen minutes a vintage Volkswagen Squareback—one where the back seats fold down flat to form a small station wagon—turned into the Radcliffe driveway and crunched over the gravel toward the back of the house, the driver giving me a curious look when she saw me parked in front of the house. The tops of numerous grocery bags showed through the rear window. I got out and followed the white car up the driveway on foot. By the time I made it to the rear, she had pulled into a rickety carport and was already out of the VW and lifting the back panel to get at the groceries. I called to her, "Are you Mrs. Radcliffe?"

When she turned and I saw her face, I hoped she was. She was a genuine brunette beauty with blue eyes under fine black brows and the smoothest, loveliest mahogany tan I've seen in my life. The rounded contours of her slim figure were pleasantly revealed by the slacks and windbreaker she wore.

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"Yes, I'm Mrs. Radcliffe." Her voice was as nice as her face and figure.

I introduced myself, showed her my credentials, and told her what I wanted. "Oh," she said with a smile, "they're in the house. I took them to Florida with me during our vacation. I'm sorry to have caused you this trouble. If you'll wait just a minute, I'll get them for you, Mr. Johnson."

"Let me help you carry these groceries in," I offered. "You have quite a load there."

"Thanks," she said. "I'll open the door." She hefted a paper bag in one arm and started for the back door. I grabbed up two more bags and followed her.

The door opened directly into the kitchen, which was small but well equipped with modern appliances. She put her grocery bag down on the work surface between the sink and the refrigerator and pushed a lock of shiny black hair back from her eyes. I placed my two bags beside hers and said, "I'll get the rest of your stuff, Mrs. Radcliffe, while you get me the library books."

"Okay," she said, disappearing through a swinging door toward the front of the house. I returned to the Volkswagen and got the remaining bags of groceries out of the back. I was just about to slam the lid down when a glint of sunlight on metal caught my eye under a loose corner of the rubber mat that covered the VW's engine hatch.

Curious, I flipped back the mat. Lying half under its edge was a gold ring—a plain heavy band with a couple of green stones set in it. I picked it up and carried it into the house with the groceries. As I set my burden down in the kitchen, Mrs. Radcliffe's voice reached me through the swinging door. "In here, Mr. Johnson. I've got the books."

"Right." I went through the swinging door and found myself in the dining area of an L-shaped living room. I rounded the corner of the L and saw Mrs. Radcliffe depositing a stack of books on a coffee table before a gaily upholstered sofa.

"Six?" she said.

"Six is right." I approached the coffee table, admiring the graceful curve of her back as she straightened up. "Have you lost any gold rings lately, Mrs. Radcliffe? I found this one just now in the back of your car." I held the ring out to her.

Her silken brows drew together in a brief puzzled frown. Then she laughed. "Oh, *that* dumb ring! I wondered where I lost it." She took

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the ring from my fingers and dropped it carelessly into a side pocket of her windbreaker. "Thank you."

"Dumb?" I said idly. "It looks pretty nice to me. Almost like an antique."

"Antique?" She laughed again, a nice little cascade of sound. "Some antique. It's a gag gift from my husband. He gave it to me when we left for Florida." She held out her ringless left hand. "I don't wear a wedding ring, so Jack thought it would be fun to have me wear one on our vacation so folks would realize we were respectable married people. It was a dumb idea. And the ring was too big for me, so I promptly lost it." She smiled at me. "How much is the fine?"

I consulted my list. "Six dollars and thirty cents."

She dug into her purse, murmuring, "Antique ring. That's good. What made you think that?"

I shrugged. "I saw some that looked like it last winter at a Spanish-treasure museum near Cape Kennedy, Florida. With a lot of stuff recovered from a Spanish treasure ship. Rings and bracelets and necklaces and stuff. You should have seen it. There were even some pieces of ancient Chinese porcelain."

"Sounds fascinating," she said. "I'd like to see it on our next visit to Florida. This time we spent our two weeks on the west coast, near Clearwater." She handed me a ten-dollar bill and I made change for her. Then I went through my regular routine of holding the library books upside down and riffling through them to make sure no bookmarks or forgotten papers were between the pages. A receipted bill from a Holiday Inn fell out of one of them and fluttered to the floor. I stooped over and recovered it and handed it to Mrs. Radcliffe.

She went to open the door for me since my arms were full of books and said, "Thanks again, Mr. Johnson. I'm sorry I caused a bother."

"That's it?" asked Randall when I'd finished. "That's all? You want me to slap an attempted murder charge on Shoemaker on the basis of *that?*"

"That's just the background. It didn't mean anything to me either—until I saw the tan on Shoemaker."

"He wasn't driving his car when it pushed you, Hal."

"That's what he says. How do you know it's true?"

"How do I know it's not?"

"The coincidence of his having a heavy tan and owning a car that

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almost wasted me made me think about Mrs. Radcliffe some more. And a couple of other things that might mean something too."

"Such as?"

"The vague impression I saw a white Volkswagen Squareback like Mrs. Radcliffe's behind me every once in a while as I finished my morning rounds yesterday morning."

"You think she may have been following you?"

"Maybe. I put the library books in the trunk of my car when I left her and crossed her off my list and checked the list for my next stop. I was in front of her house long enough for her to slip into her VW and follow me if she felt like it."

"Why should she feel like it? You're paranoid, Hal."

I grinned at him. "Maybe. All the same, that 'dumb' gold ring I found in her car *did* look like an honest-to-God antique, Lieutenant. Heavy yellow gold with a setting of rough-cut emeralds."

"You couldn't tell a rough-cut emerald from a cake of green soap," Randall hooted. "What do you know about women's jewelry?"

"Not much. But I do know how to remember pretty good, you'll admit that, won't you?"

Randall waved a hand. "So you've got a photographic memory. What's it got to do with this?"

"I remembered something about that hotel bill that fell out of one of Mrs. Radcliffe's library books. I didn't think anything about it at the time, but later, when these other things began to hit me—"

"What about the hotel bill?"

"It was from a Holiday Inn at Titusville, Florida."

"And?"

"That's just a hop, skip, and a jump from Cape Kennedy, where that sunken-treasure museum is."

Randall began to look thoughtful.

"Mrs. Radcliffe told me she and her husband spent their vacation on the west coast, near Clearwater. She was lying. Why? And why did she follow me around in her car until I stopped for lunch at Johnny's Cafeteria? If she did, that is."

Randall wasn't smiling condescendingly at me any more. "What time did Henderson tell you Shoemaker's car was reported stolen?"

"Twelve noon."

"And what time did you stop for lunch at Johnny's?"

"About quarter of twelve."

"Plenty of time for Radcliffe to telephone Shoemaker and tell him you'd seen the ring and the Holiday Inn bill. Plenty of time for him

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to report his car stolen before he used it to come out to Johnny's and pick up on you when you left? And maybe follow you to Wolf Hollow Bridge where he saw his chance and pushed you off it? Is that what you mean?" When Randall's brain started ticking it ticked fast. "And therefore whatever Radcliffe thought you'd learned from her ring and her hotel bill was important enough to be worth killing you for?"

I said, "I *know* what they were afraid I'd learned, Lieutenant. I went right from Haas Brothers to *The Examiner*'s office and went through the back copies of the newspaper for the last two weeks. I found this item that I missed when it came out last week." I put the copy I'd made of it down on the desk before him. It had an inconspicuous two-column headline followed by a brief block of copy. It had been on page 4 of the first section four days ago.

GUARD SLAIN IN MILLION-DOLLAR ROBBERY

Cape Kennedy (UP) Police intensified their search today for the thieves who fatally shot a museum guard while stealing nearly a million dollars' worth of old coins and jewelry from the Museum of Spanish Treasure here last Friday.

Cape Kennedy Police Chief George Boniface said he had alerted smelting firms throughout Florida about the theft, hoping to head off any attempt to melt down the irreplaceable artifacts.

The thieves broke into the Museum early Friday morning, bypassing burglar alarms with apparent ease, smashed plate-glass display cases, and helped themselves to the eighteenth-century Spanish treasure recovered from the sea floor. The lone security guard on duty, Lancelot Frederick, was shot by one of the thieves when he attempted to prevent the robbery. He later succumbed after informing police there were two men and a woman involved in the theft, all wearing ski masks to conceal their identity.

Lieutenant Randall didn't bother to read the item all the way through. He grabbed the phone and barked into the mouthpiece, "Get me the Police Chief of Cape Kennedy, Florida, Jerry, name of George Boniface—in a hurry!" He turned toward me, slamming the receiver down. "We'll take it from here, Hal. I'll be in touch."

I stood up. "Go easy on Mrs. Radcliffe," I said. "I feel like a heel for even suspecting her."

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A few weeks later the affair had been wrapped up with Randall's usual neatness and dispatch. Shoemaker and the Radcliffes had been returned to Florida to stand trial for murder, armed robbery, and grand theft, with enough solid evidence to put them away for a long, long time. Item: Shoemaker's Police Positive .38 revolver, which was found to have fired the bullet that ended the life of the museum guard. Item: a pencilled diagram of the intricate burglar-alarm system of the Spanish Treasure Museum, obviously made on the spot during preliminary visits to the museum by John Radcliffe, who turned out to be not only an electrical engineer employed by a local firm called Continental Alarms, Inc., but a college classmate and the oldest friend of Frank Shoemaker. Item: a taped confession by Mrs. Radcliffe, recounting the robbery and designating Frank Shoemaker as the guard's killer. And item: two suitcases full of the Spanish treasure stolen from the Museum, discovered by police in the bedroom closet of Frank Shoemaker at 818 Northway Road.

I told Ellen all about it over dinner at the Lotus Bud, one of the poshest restaurants around. I was mellow enough from two martinis and a half bottle of Mateus rosé to boast a little. "Aren't you proud of me, Ellen?" I asked her. "Figuring out the entire plot from a ring they just happened to drop when they were stowing their loot in the back of Radcliffe's VW for their trip home?"

She said, "Of course I'm proud of you. But they almost *killed* you, Hal."

"Would you have cared?"

"Of course." She flashed me a smile. "It would have been very bad publicity for the library."

"Well," I said, sighing, "that brings me to the reason I've told you all this. The Florida authorities were so glad to get their treasure back and catch the thieves, they suggested a small reward might be in order for the alert, honest library fuzz who solved the case for them."

"A reward!" Ellen exclaimed. "How exciting! What is it?"

"I have it right here in my pocket." I pulled out the antique gold ring I'd found in the back of Mrs. Radcliffe's car. The dull-gold band looked bright and polished under the restaurant lights; the rough-cut emeralds glistened. I held it out to Ellen.

She took it and said, "Oh, how lovely," and turned it this way and that, tilting her head to examine it from different angles. At last she said, "It's very beautiful, Hal, but what in the world do they

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think you're going to do with a fancy thing like this, a man of your simple ascetic tastes?"

I shrugged. "It would make a nice wedding ring," I suggested.

"For me?"

"For you."

She slipped it on her ring finger. "It's too big for me."

"I'll have it made smaller."

She protested. "It would cost us a fortune to waste any of this gold."

Cost *us?* My heart began to hammer. "Does that mean you'll take it?"

She said, "Is Mrs. Radcliffe really all that gorgeous?"

"A knockout," I said. "A dish. Black hair, blue eyes. With that sexy tan she's the best-looking woman I've seen in my life. Except for you."

"I could wear the ring around my neck on a chain," Ellen said. "Would that be all right with you, Hal?"

I took a deep breath and my cracked rib responded with a brief stab of pain. "Wear it anywhere you want to," I said, "just as long as you wear it."

She leaned over and kissed me, ignoring the other diners around us. I felt a wave of euphoria wash over me—a blessed mixture of triumph, love, tenderness. "Are you saying we're engaged?" I said, having trouble with my voice.

"You better believe it," said Ellen.

NEXT ISSUE...

11 *NEW* stories—including

JULIAN SYMONS (about the flaw)

DONALD E. WESTLAKE (about Porter)

PATRICIA MOYES (about a hit and run)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Dr. Sam Hawthorne)

SIMON BRETT (about privileged information)

THOMAS WALSH (about "a piece of cake")

plus 2 *NEW* stories from Japan

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

MYSTERY ON SCREEN: Three recent books hold special interest for movie and TV fans. Steven Jay Rubin's *The James Bond Films* (Arlington House, paper, $10.95) contains much information on the filming of the Bond series, enhanced by over 150 photos. We learn, for example, that Ian Fleming's 1960 collection of Bond short stories, *For Your Eyes Only,* grew out of an aborted CBS-TV series for which Fleming wrote several plot outlines.

In *TV Detectives* by Richard Meyers (Barnes, paper, $14.95) we learn that Fleming did furnish NBC-TV with the concept for *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* shortly before his death. The Meyers book is an interesting chronological history, with some 130 photos.

Best of the lot is Foster Hirsch's *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir* (Barnes, hardcover, $14.95), a fine study of American crime films of the 1940s and 1950s with almost 200 photos and a selected filmography. (Two minor corrections: Poe's Rue Morgue killer was not a gorilla, and Chandler didn't write ten novels about Philip Marlowe.)

VAN DINE'S FAVORITES: In 1928, following successful publication of the first three Philo Vance novels, Scribners asked S. S. Van Dine to choose his six favorite mystery novels, to be published as a set. Van Dine chose seven books, but the first two were short enough to be included in one volume. His choices: A. Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890), Israel Zangwill's *The Big Bow Mystery* (1892), Gaston Leroux's *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (1907), R. Austin Freeman's *The Eye of Osiris* (1911), Freeman Wills Crofts's *The Cask* (1920), Philip MacDonald's *The Rasp* (1924), and A. E. W. Mason's *The House of the Arrow* (1924).

After 54 years it's still a good list, and though the Scribner set is long out of print most of the titles are available in other editions. Scribner Crime Classics is one paperback series helping to revive deserving old mysteries, most recently with a new edition of Arthur W. Upfield's *Death of a Swagman* (1945).

PRIVATE-EYE WRITERS UNITE: Writer Robert Randisi has founded Private-Eye Writers of America, a

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new organization that will exchange information about writers and books through a monthly newsletter. There may also be a New York convention called Eye-Con, and possibly an annual award for the best private-eye novel. Bill Pronzini is the group's first president. Dues are $10.00 a year for any author of a private-eye novel or short story, and affiliate memberships are also available. Checks should be payable to Robert Randisi, 1811 E. 35th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11234.

WOOLRICH REVISITED: Ballantine Books will reprint the classic suspense novels of Cornell Woolrich, starting with *The Black Curtain* and *The Black Path of Fear* in September. The other "Black" novels will follow, along with *Phantom Lady, Night Has a Thousand Eyes,* and others. Some Woolrich short-story collections may be added next year. All books will have new Introductions by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

SPY NOVELS: Bowling Green University's Popular Press recently published LeRoy L. Panek's *The Special Branch: The British Spy Novel, 1890–1980,* an excellent study of the subject as seen through the works of seventeen authors, from William Le Queux to Frederick Forsyth.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: This summer's big spy novel is likely to be an unusual one—James Carroll's *Sub Rosa* (Little Brown), about three generations of a family involved in international intelligence work. It'll be a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, probably in July.

Lawrence Block's new Matthew Scudder mystery, *Eight Million Ways To Die,* is due from Arbor House in August. And Margaret Truman follows up her first two Washington mysteries with *Murder in the Supreme Court* from Arbor in July.

Ron Goulart is editing *The Great British Detective* for fall publication by Mentor Books, following Kittredge and Krauzer's 1978 Mentor anthology, *The Great American Detective.*

Walker's spring mystery list includes two special treats: *Murder in Paradise* by Jocelyn Davey (May) and *The Mischief Makers* by William Haggard (June).

Frederick Forsyth's first collection of mystery-intrigue tales, *No Comebacks,* is due from Viking in June. Many of the ten stories are new to America.

Coming this month is a change-of-pace novel from Thomas Chastain, *Nightscape* (Atheneum), about a band of feral children who roam Central Park.

Bodley Head, London, is said to be planning a two-volume edition of G. K. Chesterton's "serious prose," to be edited by Graham Greene.

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"Q"

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

A recent enforced hospital stay (which caused this column to be absent from the May EQMN) has brought to mind those very interesting screen mysteries which have had hospital settings. And what proper settings the antiseptic, still hospital corridors are, heavy with the drama of life and death.

Indeed, one of the best movie mysteries of all, the British *Green for Danger* (1947), drawn from one of Christianna Brand's Inspector Cockrill novels, takes place almost completely in a wartime country hospital. A mailman injured in a bombing is brought in for a routine operation but dies on the table—it is murder, and we know that one of the personnel in the operating room must be the killer. What makes the film so enduring is the civilized interplay of the characters, all *equally* suspect, its novel method of medical murder, and the leisurely investigation by Alastair Sim as Cockrill. Not that the film is without tension and terror, especially when leading up to the second murder: a nurse who has already blurted she knows too much is stalked in a pitch-dark dispensary by a killer in a surgical mask and gown we see for one horrifying moment in the light shed by an opening door. (The movie was produced by the celebrated team of Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, who had previously done the screenplay for *The Lady Vanishes.)*

American films too have had their share of hospital murders. *Mystery of the White Room* (1939), a Universal Crime Club production, starts with a routine operation during which the lights suddenly go out and the head of surgery is killed. Young doctor Bruce Cabot must find a murderer among his colleagues. Mignon G. Eberhart's creation, middle-aged Nurse Sarah Keate, had an active screen career solving hospital mysteries, played by actresses as varied as Jane Darwell and Ann Sheridan. She made her debut in *While the Patient Slept* (1935), was renamed Sally Keating in *The Murder of Dr. Harrigan* (1936), in which both the chief surgeon and the director of a hospital are killed over an ether formula.

She solves *The Great Hospital Mystery* (1937), in which one patient already dead is shot and another pretends death, and in *The Patient in Room 18* (1938) tracks down the theft of radium from her hospital—for medical centers, as the movies have frequently noted, sometimes have vaults more valuable than banks. Mary Roberts Rinehart's Nurse Adams, called "Miss Pinkerton" by the police in admiration, has had her share of movie mysteries *(Miss Pinkerton* and *The Nurse's Secret),* but generally she leaves her hospital for private duty elsewhere. Even Doctor Kildare and Ben Casey have had their murders to solve. And we must note that the film, *Ellery Queen and*

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the Murder Ring (1941), based on *The Dutch Shoe Mystery,* has the woman owner of Stack Memorial Hospital strangled on the operating table.

Basil Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes films have touched on the medical: at the climax of *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* (1943) the evil Professor Moriarty has the detective strapped to his private underground operating table and proposes to kill him by drawing out his blood drop by drop—a lingering death, long enough for Doctor Watson to come to the rescue.

In *The Pearl of Death* (1944), the monstrous Oxton Creeper comes for his final victim, a doctor in a suburban surgery. The doctor is in a mask and gown, concealing of course Holmes himself. And Rathbone himself has starred as *The Mad Doctor* (1941).

In more recent hospital films murder is secondary to other criminal activity. In the pioneering, grimly realistic *Sleeping City* (1947), actually filmed at New York's Bellevue Hospital, an intern is killed to cover the systematic theft of narcotics. Richard Conte plays the cop who poses as a new intern to find the murderer. The movie was so bleak and hard it was condemned by then Mayor William O'Dwyer as untruly reflecting the city's medical service. Drugs have been stolen from hospitals as recently as *Fort Apache* (1980).

Coma (1978) takes the theme of the hospital-as-stockpile one step further when doctor Genevieve Bujold wonders why healthy patients lapse and die after minor operations. Their body parts are being sold! Robin Cook's ingenious plot has already been reused several times on the screen and television, as has the novel new idea of surgical cloning. The prognosis seems clear: a rich, bloody future for medical murder at the movies.

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INTERVIEW: PATRICIA MOYES (1)

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

EQMN: You're one of the finest practitioners of the classic whodunit. Who has influenced you?

MOYES: I'm not really sure what a classic whodunit is except that it isn't mainly concerned with violence but with plot and that it never cheats its readers. My favorite mystery reading, before I began to write, was the work of Dame Ngaio Marsh, Margery Allingham, Rex Stout, Josephine Tey, and, of course, Dorothy Sayers. Agatha Christie's plots were impeccable, but I could never really believe in her characters. Miss Marple is certainly the best, but even she is slightly stereotyped.

However, by far the greatest influence on my writing came not from another detective-story writer but from Peter Ustinov, for whom and

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with whom I was privileged to work for eight years. He has never to my knowledge written a mystery —perhaps this unconsciously pushed me towards a form he had never tried, because I knew I could never equal him if he did. In any case, he taught me, by example, all the technique of writing I possess, plus the enormous value of humor. I try to make my books amusing as well as exciting.

EQMN: Would you elaborate on a statement you once made about fictional characters being miracles?

MOYES: My characters are miracles to me. I try to visualize them, I write about them, at first, with a sense of artificial unreality—and suddenly, like birds, they take off and become independent creatures with wills of their own. Not quite all of them, of course, but enough to fill their creator with wonder. Once this magic moment has occurred, woe betide the author who tries to deny a character his or her own life. You may have to revise your ideas, change your plot, anything—but the essential is to preserve that spark of life which, without knowing just how, you have created. To me, such fictional characters are as miraculous as life itself.

EQMN: Are Chief Inspector Henry Tibbett and his wife Emmy based on anyone you know?

MOYES: Henry Tibbett is not based on anybody I know—except Henry Tibbett, whom I know very well. He exists in his own right—at least in my mind. Emmy, on the other hand, is definitely a projection of myself. Well, I must qualify that. *I* think she is a projection of myself, but everybody who knows me says we're quite different. I can only presume that she is a sort of wish-fulfillment—the person I would like to be.

EQMN: Do the Tibbetts' skiing and yachting interests reflect interests of your own?

MOYES: Yes. Skiing and sailing are the only two sports I really love. Since moving to the tropics, skiing has become a great rarity, although I have been back to Switzerland once or twice. However, there is plenty of sailing here.

EQMN: Have you any other major interests outside of your work?

MOYES: My major interest is the study of ancient civilizations —particularly Egypt. I'm most fascinated by the Old Kingdom—the pyramid builders—but even so it was a wonderful experience for me when the Tutankhamun Exhibition came to Washington. I knew every piece from photographs, but nothing had prepared me for the incredible beauty of the real thing.

My other form of relaxation is solving crossword puzzles, the most complicated ones I can find. In a way I can't explain, this seems to help my unconscious mind to sort out any tangles in whatever writing I'm doing at the time.

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

Carter Dickson's newly reprinted *The Skeleton in the Clock* (Bantam, $2.25) was first published in 1948, relatively late in the career of Sir Henry Merrivale. Only a few years later, John Dickson Carr would virtually abandon both Sir Henry and the Dickson pseudonym to concentrate on historical detection and an occasional case for Dr. Gideon Fell. Critics were beginning to grow impatient with the increasing doses of slapstick and farce in the series, and truthfully they had a point. Comedy aside, however, the revelation of a surprise killer, concealed despite a chain of ingenious clues that looks blatantly obvious (but only in retrospect), is nothing short of dazzling.

In a time when puzzles of this caliber are only slightly less rare than unicorns, it is awe-inspiring to reflect that this kind of thing was routine for Dickson/Carr in the Thirties and Forties. The obligatory impossible crime is here—a man with no one near him seemingly pushed off a flat roof—as is the brooding, spooky atmosphere.

Fortunately, if no one ever writes another Golden Age-style detective novel, there are enough already written to keep most of us in reading matter for a lifetime. An excellent but relatively neglected practitioner of the British formal school is currently being rediscovered, and one of his early novels now appears in what seems, incredibly enough, to be its first American edition.

**** Cyril Hare: *Death is no Sportsman,* Harper/Perennial, $2.50. First published in Britain in 1937, this English-village fishing mystery stars Inspector Mallett, later to play second fiddle to barrister Francis Pettigrew. From the playful title (itself a clue), through the map and alibis and timetables and calling-in-the-Yard, to the final gathering of the suspects, this is a prime example of what to some traditionalists (not all of them named Barzun and Taylor) the detective story is all about.

*** Laura Black: *Strathgallant,* St. Martin's, $11.95. Set in a Scottish castle in the Nineteenth Century, this is pure romance (multiple-suitor type) for the first two-thirds and a mystery thriller for the rest of the distance. Narrator Perdita Sinclair is a likeable heroine, but the best character is the aged Countess of Strathgallant, whom Edna May Oliver could have played very well. Though the tale sometimes approaches the comic in its labyrinthine complications, Black has the style to carry it off.

*** Alisa Craig: *Murder Goes Mumming,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $10.95. Murder strikes a Christmas house party—snowbound, needless to say—in the wilds of Canada. Royal Mountie Madoc Rhys handles the sleuthing, untangling the twisted relationships of a merrily unlikeable family.

The scene is well set, and Craig (a.k.a. Charlotte MacLead) provides a pretty good puzzle by current standards. The trap-the-killer gim-

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mick, though, was old hat in Carolyn Wells's day.

*** Margaret Millar: *Mermaid,* Random House, $11.50. In his third (and perhaps best) case, lawyer Tom Aragon becomes involved with the problems of a beautiful young retarded woman, her family, and her classmates at a special school for problem children of the rich. Though many of the standard accouterments of the mystery are here, the tale develops along very unconventional and unpredictable lines, rich in both humor and humanity.

*** William Campbell Gault: *The CANA Diversion,* Raven House, $2.25. The second novel of Gault's mystery comeback presents a situation virtually unique in mystery fiction: one of the author's series private eyes, Brock (the Rock) Callahan, investigates the murder of another, Joe Puma.

The case's haunting resolution of the mystery makes it even more unusual. CANA is a group called Citizens Against Nuclear Armageddon, trying to stop the building of a nuclear power plant in San Valdesto. Gault and Callahan are not reluctant to take sides in the controversy.

** Antonia Fraser: *A Splash of Red,* Norton, $12.95. Some are charmed by the cases of British TV personality Jemima Shore, and some are not. This well written, intelligent, but slow-moving and uninvolving story of a novelist's murder put me in the latter camp. The accurate description of the British Library reading room is quite enjoyable, though.

** William Dobson: *The Ripper,* Signet, $2.25. A new Jack the Ripper, this one non-sexist in his choice of victim, is terrorizing London, and private detective Jack Shepherd is hired to investigate. The author (a.k.a. Michael Butterworth) is a smooth professional, but the novel is too routine in its writing and development to rise above the level of adequate timekiller.

The anonymous *Mystery* (Jove, $1.50), part of the No-Frills Book series, is not the hilarious parody I'd hoped for but simply a deliberately routine private-eye story told at an even faster than normal pace. It's a reductive exercise designed to make the reader ask, "Why do I read this kind of stuff?" It didn't work.

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a *NEW* short story by

PETER GODFREY

It wasn't as though the mask had always been there. Or had it? He hadn't seen it when they were courting. It was only after two years of marriage that he began noticing the signs . . .

THE SHADOW BEHIND THE FACE

by PETER GODFREY

He didn't know which was the face and which was the mask: the smooth softness of her cheeks and lips, the straight nose, delicate eyebrows, and widely spaced eyes, or the greedy lustful thing that lay beneath?

Each time he pondered the problem, he remembered their days of courtship, the sweetness of stolen kisses, the great longing in their arms and bones, the haunting agony when she went away, then the overcoming of obstacles, their marriage, the passionate impulse each to the other gradually merging and becoming a part of the great new spirit of camaraderie that was their life together.

And when he remembered these things he became certain that her face was her true face and the mask was a malignance, like a luminous shadow under her flesh. Then he would think, But how did it get there?—and other doubts would arise and his mind would go endlessly on through the old vicious circle.

It wasn't as though it had always been there. Or had it? He hadn't seen it when they were courting. It was only after two years of marriage that he began noticing the signs. Little things at first. Slight accentuations of normal moods and emotions, pique that be-

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came irritability, sadness that developed into depression, mirth that laughed too loud.

Soon it all became more and more pronounced—or did he notice them more because he was watching for them?

He wasn't even sure that what he saw wasn't some morbid by-product of his imagination.

At least, not until that night in October.

He had lately given up smoking, and when the craving was on him he had developed the habit of washing it away with hot, sweet chocolate. They had been in the cinema, and from the commencement of the feature film he felt uncomfortable. The peppermint he sucked did nothing to alleviate the hollowness in the back of his throat, the intense need for tobacco. He thought of going out for some chocolate but they were seated in the middle of a row and he throttled his impatience.

He began to be vividly conscious of how often the characters on the screen lit up cigarettes. The movement of their lips and hands tortured him. From somewhere behind him, the air-conditioning brought him a whiff of aromatic tobacco. Once, when the heroine stubbed out a cigarette she had barely lit, he felt his fingers tense to reach out and take it.

He was irritable in the car, but she never said a word. After his first few grumbles he too relapsed into silence, but over and above the purr of the engine it was as though the tension between them was crackling with invective.

At home she moved, not towards the kitchen, but down the passage to their bedroom.

"What about my chocolate?" he asked loudly, and when she did not answer he strode after her and gripped her arm. She pulled against his fingers momentarily and then turned and looked directly at him.

With a sense of shock he saw the face behind her face contorted with an anger and a brittleness that dwarfed his.

But when she spoke, it was her own lips that moved. "I won't be a minute. Go and heat up the milk. Please."

He still held her, and in a flash her lips narrowed cruelly and he saw the evil gleam of the white teeth of the other. "Let go, you swine!" she spat and tore herself loose.

At any other time he would have left her alone, but that night his anger spurred him. He followed her.

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She had just emptied the powder from the blue paper onto her tongue when she saw him. There was a great fear in her eyes, but a force stronger than that fear made her hand lift the glass and drain the powder down.

He asked stupidly, "Did you have a headache?" But he knew it wasn't a headache powder she had taken, and she knew he knew. The next second she was in his arms, sobbing as though her heart would break.

The story came out between sobs. How she had first been persuaded to try the drug because she always felt so tired and listless, because she feared she was losing the flush of his love. The marvelous feeling of exhilaration the powder gave her, and then the letdown and the need for more. Then larger and larger doses, and the terrible realization one day that her soul was irretrievably chained to a few white crystals in a slip of blue paper.

His anger left him. While she spoke, he cupped her face in his hands and looked deep into her eyes. He saw only the face of the girl he had married.

Her words bred in him a feeling of deep sadness, but underlying that was a curious sensation of elation and triumph. Perhaps it was because things that had been dark to him before were now crystal-clear.

While she lay quiescent in his arms, he thought about the mask and the shadow it had cast over their life together. "Now that we know what it is," he said, "we can fight it."

She shivered. "You don't understand. It's—too late for fighting. *Much* too late. I've tried."

"You tried by yourself before, but it's different now. Believe me, I know how to beat this thing."

She flinched away from him in sudden panic. "Not a doctor," she said. "I won't be put in a home. I won't."

He stroked her with his voice. "No, no doctor. Just you and I. And nobody will know."

Her words were calm, but there was desperation in the undertones. "It won't work. I've tried, I tell you. It won't work."

"Nonsense," he said. "You may have tried, but you didn't know the right method. The main thing is that you want to give it up."

He paused and then added, "Do you?"

She turned away from him abruptly.

"I'm not sure," she said, and went on fiercely, "No, don't interrupt me. I want to tell you about the last time I tried to stop. It was just

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ten days ago. I knew what I was doing was wrong—I was tortured by my conscience and I made up my mind to stop it there and then.

"That was at three in the afternoon. By five the craving was so strong my nerves seemed to keep up a perpetual jangling. At seven I said I had a headache and went to bed. I must have slept for a while, although I don't know how, but it couldn't have been for long because you hadn't come to bed yet.

"When I woke, the craving was gone and I felt a great peace in my mind. I remember thinking, I've won! That's all there was to it, a short sharp fight, and now I'm free!

"Then I saw there was no water in the glass on the bedside table and next to the table, on the floor, was a crumpled slip of blue paper.

"It took me a few seconds to realize the significance, and when I did I was unwilling to believe it. I sprang out of bed and rushed to count the powders. There was one less than there had been an hour before.

"Through my confusion I fell asleep, but the next morning I worked it out calmly and rationally. I thought, So I can't control my actions in my sleep? Right. Then I mustn't sleep. You see, I had become obsessed with the idea that if only I could keep away from the drug for twenty-four hours, the major battle would be over. That was why I didn't throw the powders away—I felt they would have to be there to make my victory complete.

"I rested as much as I could during the day, bracing myself against the craving that would come early in the evening. And when it came, it didn't seem so bad at first, but my initial satisfaction didn't last long. By nine o'clock my nerves were screaming.

"I went to bed only because it was torture to walk about and be spoken to, but I had no intention of sleeping. Over and above my mental agony came a drowsiness, but I fought against it because I knew what that would mean. Then a terrible thing happened."

She caught her breath in a pause.

"I was lying on the bed, willing myself to be still, vividly conscious in my defiance of the dreadful attraction of the drug. I want you to remember that—I was quite conscious and I was willing my body to lie still. But it moved all the same. It got out of bed and walked to the drawer. My hand reached forward. I tried to stop it, tried so hard that my conscious seemed to stretch and tear, but the hand kept moving. The fingers twitched open a packet and poured the powder onto my tongue.

"I fought—how can I describe it?—my mind was in an agony of

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effort and frustration, but my muscles seemed to belong to someone else. I was filled with an anger and a resentment a million times more fierce than I could normally imagine, let alone experience. But I kept on fighting, right through the movement of bringing the water to my lips to the last second when my throat swallowed and it was over."

She paused again, and this time he prompted her. "But why aren't you sure whether you want to give it up?"

"Don't you see? I don't know whether anything can make up for the suffering involved in fighting the urge, particularly now I'm sure it can't be beaten."

"Come with me," he said, and put his arm about her shoulders.

Together they walked down the passage to his study. There she sat down while he selected a book from the shelves.

He began to read to her, drily and unemotionally, a tale of horror which was all the more horrible because it too was dry and unemotional, couched in precise scientific terms.

It told in objective phrases exactly what happens to a drug addict from the preliminary stages of exhilaration and exhaustion to where the difference between maddening pleasure and excruciating agony became the finest of hairlines, and on to the inevitable mental, moral, and physical disintegration. He put the book down. "Do you see now why you must stop?" he asked. But behind the horror and fear in her eyes he saw also a bitter resignation.

He repeated, "Do you see now?"

"It's no good!" she sobbed. "Oh, can't you understand? Even if what is going to happen is ten times worse than the book says, the fear isn't enough to kill the terrible need of *now*."

Suddenly he realized he must throw everything he had into the struggle. "Listen," he said, and felt his fingers press through her soft flesh to the shoulder bone, "Listen. Before we were married, when it seemed impossible we would come together, I fought for you and you helped me and we won. Now the choice is yours. Either you fight this thing with my help and win again or you give in and give me up too."

She said, "What do you mean?"

His voice was like a whiplash. "I married a girl I loved and respected. I didn't marry a drug-crazed coward reconciled to an early lunatic grave. And I will not under any circumstances remain married to one."

The lash had struck her a dreadful blow. She flinched, and at her

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next doubtful words he felt he had as good as won. "But—how can I fight this thing?"

"Will power."

"I've tried that and failed."

"You've tried it, yes, but not intelligently. All you did was impose a prohibition on yourself. What you must do is force yourself into a substitute activity."

She looked at him queerly. "I'm not sure I understand."

"Let me put it this way. You know I've given up smoking—it's a week since I had my last cigarette. You're a nonsmoker, so you don't know what the craving for tobacco is like but, believe me, when you're used to sixty cigarettes a day, it's strong."

He sensed her unspoken suggestion and hurried on. "Your craving may be stronger, it probably is, but the general principle of the cure is exactly the same. When the urge to smoke becomes intolerable I force myself to drink the chocolate. Almost from the beginning I've found it relieves the craving, and daily it's becoming easier. The chocolate has become a sort of mental crutch. That's what I mean by substitute activity."

She said, hopelessly, "It's no good—"

Again his voice became brutal. "It's that or you must do without me."

For a moment her eyes were like those of a hunted animal, and then suddenly she softened in a mist of tears. "I can't do without you, darling," she said, and he gathered her into his arms.

With her wet cheek on his chest he talked on, in elation. "Now we must find you some substitute activity. What shall it be? I know—the chocolate. We're fighting it together, let's do the same thing. Will you join me with the chocolate?"

She nodded her head vigorously against him and he held her away gently. "That reminds me why I was so irritable," he said. "I could do with a cup right now."

"Go and put the milk on then," she said, "while I see what I can do to look human again."

While they sipped the beverage together, and until he finally fell asleep, he felt happily confident. It was mainly because he now knew all about the mask. One can fight what one understands.

He came back early from the office the next afternoon and after he had kissed her he searched her with his eyes. She read his expres-

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sion and answered by direct action. From behind the mantel clock she took nine blue powder wrappers.

"I've been waiting to give them to you," she said and he kissed her again. But he thought it better not to let her see him wash the white crystals down the kitchen sink.

At six o'clock a nervous gesture of hers attracted his attention and he saw, quite clearly, the other face pushing through her flesh. "I think I'll have some chocolate," she said and moved towards the kitchen.

He called after her, "Don't forget mine" and swallowed two or three times in anticipation—he could do with a cigarette.

She brought in the cups and he tried not to let her see him watching her. He talked inconsequentialities and felt a great relief when she began to answer in the same vein. When they had finished she came and sat next to him on the settee and he put his arms about her. She snuggled her head on his shoulder.

She was quiet, and when he looked down at her she was fast asleep. And the face he saw was her own face, with no trace of the other showing.

When she woke she seemed a little nervous, but he held her close until it was time for dinner. After the meal they again curled up together on the settee. He turned down the lights and made love to her as he had done in the first flush of their honeymoon.

In the weeks that followed, the act of drinking the beverage together came to mean more than just a compensation for a craving. It began to symbolize a new life and happiness for both of them. He watched her, of course, or rather he watched the shadow behind her face. He saw when it came and how the chocolate drove it away and how gradually, when it did come, it seemed each time to be less and less distinct. Until even he could hardly see it.

It was only then he was able to explain to her about the mask, gently and with a quiet flush of triumph at their joint victory. She said nothing, but looked at him with a sort of wonder, kissed him, and lay for a long time with her head on his chest.

He was detained at the office one afternoon and came home late and irritable. For the first time since his newfound gentleness with her, he spoke sharply. "Sit down," she said, "and I'll bring you some chocolate."

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She went out, but he didn't sit—and it seemed to him she was taking an unduly long time. He walked into the kitchen.

The two cups of chocolate stood on a tray on the table. She was drinking a glass of water. As she saw him she gave an involuntary gesture of avoidance.

A piece of blue paper fluttered to the floor.

His muscles seemed to react to the situation before his brain did. He stopped in his tracks as the implications of her action struck him. "My God!" he said bitterly. "Again? But why—why? What's happened to your will power? I thought when you stopped—"

"I never stopped." She was facing him with a sort of brittle calm that checked the rush of his words.

"But the powders, I threw them away—"

"Table salt. Ordinary table salt wrapped in blue paper."

Again anger bubbled past his tongue. "Why did you lie to me? God, it's contemptible! Why all the elaborate deceit?"

"I had to," she said and there was a fierce exultation in her tone. "Do you remember the alternative you offered me? It didn't do any good frightening me, reading from that book of yours. I knew I could never give up the drug, no matter what the consequences were—I knew it, not with my mind, but with every living tissue in my body.

"Then you told me the other thing, remember? You told me you'd leave me, and I heard in your voice you meant it. In that moment I realized that even though I couldn't do without the drug, I couldn't do without you either."

"So you resorted to lying and trickery! But it won't help you, do you hear? By God, I meant what I said: I won't spend the rest of my life with—a mask!"

"Yes, the mask." Her voice had a vibrancy even more compelling than his anger. "Strange how you misinterpreted that. You thought what you called the mask was something alien to me, an evil perversion injected into my normal personality by the drug. But what you see is the real me, the *hungry* me peering through the mould and expressions formed by years of social taboo and repression. We've all got that deprived, restricted inner self. Just weaken the social pressure by any means and the real face begins to come through. Why don't you look in the mirror?"

His eyes turned to the glass on the wall. He saw his features reflected back to him, perfectly normal, perhaps slightly flushed from anger. But behind his flesh a shadow moved, a gruesome travesty of his own face, and a lustful horror leered through his eyes.

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"What have you done?" he cried out.

Her voice was still calm. "There was only one way to keep us together. I went back to the bedroom—remember?—to fix my face. That was when I fetched the powder to drop into your chocolate. And every time you've had chocolate since another powder has gone into your cup."

Emotion made him hoarse. "I'll beat it. Will power. I'll beat it."

She shook her head. "It's too late. I know. I've watched your eyes. I've watched you building up an attitude to the drinking chocolate, a sort of religious fanaticism as though it had a special and holy significance for both of us. You weren't wrong, you know. It was bringing us together again."

He repeated. "I'll fight it."

"It won't do you any good. You'll see for yourself in a minute. That's your cup nearest you."

He looked at the shaped china, and the bubbles on the surface of the liquid winked at him with translucent purple eyes.

His face must have shown what he felt, because she leant forward an touched him, and her eyes were suddenly wet. "Oh my poor darling," she said, "don't hurt yourself like this. Drink your chocolate."

"No," he said. "No!"

But even as he spoke his finger crooked around the handle of the cup.

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"The old homestead with its memories was all that really mattered to her . . . Without that house, its every splinter intimate to her, without the farm, its every field and orchard one with her, she had no goal, no meaning" . . .

THE GOOD TIMES ALWAYS END

by DAVID MORRELL

I knew she'd blame me, but I couldn't very well stand by and let the cops go in. Their uniforms, their badges and their guns—they would have scared her. This way, hearing it from me, she might go willingly, though with reluctance. She might realize she had no choice. She'd have a chance to leave with dignity.

The house had been her absolute domain for sixty years. She'd moved in at the age of twenty on the day she was married. She had given birth to each of us six children there. She'd raised us there. She'd seen my dad, her husband, die there.

Now she planned to die there, too. She'd always said that. The old homestead with its memories was all that really mattered to her. It embodied her whole life's achievement, everything she had ever worked for. She was proud that she had lived to eighty, proud that she could still maintain the property. Without that house, its every splinter intimate to her, without the farm, its every field and orchard one with her, she had no goal, no meaning.

Though I wasn't there the day she got the letter from the county, I heard how she phoned the planner who had signed the letter. He explained politely why the county had to build that road.

"We'll pay you market price," the planner said. "The farm. The house. You'll make a lot of money."

"I don't need the money. Go around me."

"Mrs. Wade, the square-foot cost of asphalt . . . If we curve the road, that's too expensive."

"I don't care. I'm *staying*."

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"Mrs. Wade, that isn't possible."

The planner must have had a premonition, must have sensed the trouble coming, when he heard the strength behind that brittle, feeble voice.

"The day I leave is when I die," Mom said. "You'll have to take me out feet first."

"The road—"

"Goes over my dead body."

I'll say this to give the planner credit. He went out there to the farm. He tried to do the decent thing by facing her instead of sending her another letter. He knocked bravely on the door, and when she opened it, he introduced himself.

I have to give my mother credit, too. She wasn't going to let some nice young man sweet-talk her. She slammed the door on him.

The planner later told me that he stood outside for half an hour, talking to the door. He knew she was listening from somewhere in the house while he explained about the law, about the county's right to buy up any property it needed in the name of progress. Sure, to move would inconvenience her, he said. He sympathized. But she'd be justly compensated, and the county's needs were more important than one person's inconvenience.

Still, he never got an answer, and he finally turned to other matters that required his attention. I'm not sure if he forgot about her, or if he naturally assumed she at last would see the sense of his position. When construction started, he was overwhelmed by final details, and I know he never counted on Mom's lawyer showing up to threaten lawsuits, staying orders, and petitions to the county board.

"You mean she isn't gone?" the planner said, dismayed.

"My client totally refuses."

So of course the planner sent the sheriff out to scare her. An eviction notice through the mail was one thing, but delivered in person by a man in uniform, that clearly had more force.

My mother tore up the formal-looking document. She slammed the door. The sheriff gave her seven days.

The rest I'm sure you heard on radio or saw on television or at least read in the paper. Senior Citizen Takes On County. Aging Woman Claims Harassment. Widow Says Old Folks Described As Inconvenient. There were letters to the editor and arguments in county council, not to mention the indignant midnight phone calls waking up that planner. Sometimes pressure makes officials bend,

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and sometimes it makes them rigid. If there ever was a chance for compromise, it ended on the day the planner went to see her one last time and faced the double barrel of her shotgun.

All the while I kept in touch with her. My wife, two kids, and I have a house in town. I need two jobs, repairing cars from eight to five, then tending bar at night, to meet the payments on the house. But after all, I had one brother killed in Vietnam, another killed drunk-driving. My three sisters married and moved away. Mom had just me to watch over her, so I found time to phone her every day. I went there often, and I brought her into town to do her shopping or to go to church, so I kept up with all her news—how they were crazy if they thought she'd leave that house, how she would make them sorry if they tried to force her out.

I couldn't argue with her. Mom's word has always been the law. To tell the truth, the last year she'd been doing poorly, and this trouble seemed to liven her, to make her feisty once again. I liked the angry sparkle in her eyes.

I tried my best to help her, but it wasn't any use. The planner read me costs and schedules. I began to see that she was bound to lose. So since she hadn't made arrangements, without telling her I rented an apartment for her, close to where we lived. But every time I went to visit her, I saw dustclouds in the distance where the new road kept on stalking the house.

I knew that Wednesday was her deadline, so I took off work and drove out early, and the cops were there already with two squad cars and an ambulance. The biggest Caterpillar I had ever seen was pushing at the barn. The trucks and workmen waited. Earth movers rumbled, tearing through the cornfield, gouging deep rich topsoil.

Then the barn, its square nails screeching, toppled.

I turned, stunned, to where the planner stood grimly beside his car. I must have glared, because he quickly glanced the other way.

I walked up to the cops. And these weren't city cops. These were state cops, great big hulking brutes.

"Why the hell the ambulance?" I said.

"In case."

"In case of what?"

"Well, she might faint or something. Old the way she is, we want to make sure we take care of her. We want to show we're looking out for her."

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I don't know how I missed the two reporters and the television news crew. Now I saw them, and I understood. With the publicity, the cops were trying to look good. And even so, I could imagine how this thing would look, these massive cops, my shrunken mother struggling in their arms (I knew for sure she wouldn't walk) as they evicted her.

The cops seemed nervous, glancing toward the news crew.

"Never mind. I'll bring her out," I said.

I saw relief spread over their faces.

"It's our job," one said, but it was obvious he wanted me to argue.

"She's my mother. Save your strength for writing traffic tickets."

Lord, their guns, their badges, they would scare her half to death.

So I just shook my head from side to side disgustedly and started toward the house.

It's funny. I'd been born and raised there, but since I had moved away, the house seemed foreign to me. Until now. I guess because this was the last time I would ever see it, I remembered all the good years I had spent out here. Its plain two stories and attic needed paint. Its simple porch could use a few new boards. But it was home. It was my youth. And as I turned the doorknob, I felt sadness—for my mother, for myself. The good times always end.

I stared back to that planner, to those cops, and I went in.

There was a narrow hallway first, where in the winter we had hung our coats and lined up all our boots. I saw the hooks on the bare wood wall. I saw the worn path on the wooden floor. For one brief instant, as my throat swelled shut, I thought I heard us laughing as we went in for our supper. Then I snapped back to the present with the sound of earth removers roaring, and I forced myself to go through with this awful business.

Out of habit I had shut the door behind me. I walked along the hall and reached the second door, the one that led to the front rooms of the house. But it was open slightly, which was not at all Mom's habit, and I frowned, not understanding. Then I pushed the door and stepped inside, and that was when the object struck me on the shoulder, hard and heavy, so surprising that I flinched and groaned.

I rubbed my shoulder, peering down to where the thing had thudded loudly on the floor. I saw an iron, not a modern one, instead the old kind, black and solid, five pounds of metal. Mom preferred it. She would set it on the cook stove till it sizzled if she spat on it.

Sure, I thought. That's why the door was slightly open. Mom had

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balanced that big heavy iron up there so that someone coming in would have it fall on him. I was thankful I had closed the outside door. Those state policemen wouldn't have appreciated seeing the surprise that Mom had waiting for them.

But I wasn't injured badly. In a way, the iron was pathetic—Mom's last feeble effort to defend her home against invaders.

Now I shut the second door. The place was dark. The drapes were closed. I flicked the light switch, and I touched the water just before I felt the shock. The current jolted. Something flashed. I stumbled backward in the darkness, clutching at my hand, and snagged my foot against the wire Mom had stretched tautly across the floor.

I fell. My head cracked on a sharp-edged crate that Mom had placed strategically. I groaned again. The rumbling earth removers now seemed muffled by the ringing in my head.

I don't think I passed out, but I was dazed. I touched my head and felt the swelling and the sticky warmth of blood. In shock and anger I stood up slowly.

"Dammit, Mom, it's Charlie!"

Then I felt a nagging guilt. Mom never tolerated swearing. I tried hard to get control.

"Hey, Mom, it's me," I said, now calmly. "Tell me where you are."

She didn't answer. I was frightened. Not for me. For her. I don't know much about the law, but I suspected that these traps could be interpreted as criminal assault, as evidence she was not in her right mind. Despite her motives and her age, if anyone found out what she had done, she could be sent to jail or to a mental institution.

In the dark I couldn't find her, but I didn't trust the light switch, so I groped across the living room to reach the drapes. I barked my shins against a tea wagon, and I stumbled past a footstool.

Then I yanked the drapes and felt as if I'd grabbed a nest of hornets. Burning. Stinging. Fierce, hot, stabbing points of pain in both my hands. I screamed, fell, and struck my head again. I was now cursing in earnest. Never mind Mom's disapproval. This had gone too far.

But then I feared they had heard me outside. Favoring my tingling, bloody hands, I struggled to my feet and warily approached the drapes. I gently touched their edges.

Needles. She'd pushed needles through the edges, hundreds of them, all along both sides, their sharp points sticking out to harm any intruder. She'd anticipated every movement those policemen

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would have made. She was ahead of them, but Lord, how many other traps like this were set throughout the house?

I tugged the safest portion of the drapes. They fell and nearly smothered me. But this time I'd been clever. I had stepped back as I pulled. I saw the brilliant, welcome light. I blinked, trembled with relief. I saw the planner and the cops beside their cars outside the gate, and they did not appear alarmed, so I assumed they hadn't heard my scream.

But they were squinting toward me. They looked bored, preoccupied by the thought of other things they had to do. They wouldn't wait much longer. Soon they'd come in here to ask what made me take so long.

I waved to them and turned away. My heart was pounding.

"Mom, you've got to stop this! They can't find out what you planned for them!"

I waited, but she didn't answer. In the silent, muffled house I heard the roaring of the Caterpillar as it crunched across the parched boards of the fallen barn.

"We don't have time, Mom! Tell me where you are!"

I had to search for her. But if I didn't cut off all her exits, she might sneak from place to place until the cops came in to end this hide and seek. I had to do this systematically. The basement, then the kitchen, next the living room, the sewing room, and finally upstairs. That way I knew for sure that she was not behind me.

As I heard the earth removers rumble, I hurried to the kitchen, past the pantry and the cupboards to the cellar door beside the stainless double-sink that I'd installed for her when the original, old stone one finally had cracked apart. I vividly remembered how there'd used to be a bulky, squeaky handpump by the sink before the well went dry one blazing summer.

Then I heard three sharp blasts from a car's horn outside. No doubt the police and that planner were getting anxious. And my headache chased my reverie. I yanked the cellar door. It didn't open, and my wrist took all the pressure, jolting.

She had locked the cellar door.

I bit my lip. One needle-punctured hand spread blood on my throbbing wrist. I felt my face go pale.

"Unlock the door, Mom! Hey, it's me, Charlie! Look, I know you're down there!"

No reply. I heard three more horn blasts outside, and I knew I'd

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have to break the door down. Since the hinges faced the kitchen, all I needed was a hammer and a chisel.

In the top drawer of the cupboard by the stove. I yanked it open.

Tools fell through the unsupported bottom, slamming on my foot. I bumped against the kitchen table.

Once again she had outsmarted me, anticipating my next move. I fumbled for the hammer and the chisel. In two minutes I had knocked the final hinge-pin out. I pulled and heaved, and this time I was ready. As the door scraped free, I braced myself and stopped it from collapsing me.

The cellar stairs led to a landing and a door that opened to the outside. The shadows thickened as I started down. I tried the door, and it was locked. The stairs turned left. I faced the pitch-black basement. Groping carefully along a shelf, I found the flashlight where it had always been kept. Had she forgotten it was on that shelf?

I aimed the flashlight toward the stairs, but they seemed normal. No sawed boards. No gaps along the railing. I crept down. I saw the furnace and the shelves of canning and the old-time wringer-washer. I had told her I would buy a new washing machine for her. She'd insisted, though, that she preferred to do the wash the way she always had. I smelled the must, the dank moist mildew, like the bitter, fetid loam of old potatoes.

But I didn't see my mother. Was she crouched behind the furnace? Earlier I'd thought of hide and seek, and now I almost shouted, "Mom, I see you! Might as well come out!"

My footsteps scraped on the rough wood stairs. I thought I heard a scratch behind the washer, and I swung the flashlight, rushing down.

The stairs gave way. I screamed and dropped, my stomach rising in the darkness. As the flashlight fell and broke, my chin struck hard on a board. I hit the stone-cold floor. I couldn't breathe. I struggled as the pain raced through my body.

I had scanned the stairs, and they'd seemed normal. Now I rubbed my hand along a broken board and felt where she had sawed it. Not on top where I could have seen it. Underneath. She'd come down beneath the stairs and sawed them from below.

My fall could easily have snapped my neck or cracked my head and killed me. If those cops found out . . . This was worse than criminal assault. She'd been prepared to kill them. They could charge her with attempted murder.

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Oh, my God, I've got to find her, get her out of here before . . . and that was probably my last clear thought. My pain-wracked body trembled uncontrollably. Shock had made me weak, delirious.

I left a trail of blood as, hobbling, moaning, I searched through the basement and then every upstairs room. I do recall more horn blasts from outside, a few shouts, but I was so confused by then that all I wanted was to win the game. I suddenly was six years old. I had to find my mother.

"I don't want to be alone," I wept and pulled the attic door. A bureau fell on me. But my pain had reached its zenith, soaring toward a nightmare state of senselessness, confusion. I crawled slowly from beneath the bureau and headed for the attic.

"Mom," I sobbed. "Don't hide on me. I'm frightened."

It seemed only yesterday when I had played up here among the clothes trees and the dress forms and the moldy cardboard boxes filled with patterns, scraps, and outworn clothes. I used to try on my father's trousers up here, and I used to make believe that I was in a pirate's cave.

I crisscrossed aimlessly among the litter, tasting dust and wiping cobwebs from my face. I didn't find her.

There was only one last hiding spot. The crawlspace at the far end, underneath the eaves. I'd played there often. It was cramped and dark, a den where I had fought off Indians and stagecoach robbers, Dracula and Martians. I crept gratefully, approaching it. The low half-hidden door loomed closer, larger.

I clawed at the wooden latch.

I blinked, startled, at the double barrel of a shotgun pointed at my eyes."No, don't, Mom. Please. It's Charlie."

Click. I heard one hammer snicking back.

"No, please, Mom."

Click. The other hammer.

Swaying on my knees, I didn't have the energy to duck or run or try to hide. I just kept gaping toward the barrels.

I had hunted her, and having found her, I had lost.

The feeble, thin, frail voice came disembodied from the darkness of the crawlspace.

"Charlie?"

She was hesitant. Her voice was filled with disbelief. "Is that you, Charlie?"

"Mom, don't hurt me."

"You're supposed to be in school."

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"I didn't go, Mom. I played hooky."

"When your father hears about this, he'll—you're hurt, son. What's the matter with you?"

"I was in an accident."

"Your face, your hands, your clothes! Dear Lord, I have to get some bandages! The blood!"

"I need a doctor. There's an ambulance outside."

She didn't even ask me why the ambulance was out there. She was in another time. I heard the hammers click down on the shotgun. She was groping out. I saw the rips on her own clothes and the blood on her, evidence of her own desperate effort to arrange her fierce surprises. She was hugging me, wiping my tears. She raised her dress to swab the blood on my face.

Then she was helping me to stand, but I was so disabled, bleary, that I had to lean against her. In the end it wasn't me who took her out. It was she who took me out.

We faced the blinding sunlight and the roar of heavy road equipment. The policemen and the planner raced in through the gate.

"My God, what happened to you?" one policeman asked, alarmed.

But I was babbling, sinking to my knees.

"Why, any fool can see he's hurt," my mother told them with indignant rage. "Don't stand there looking stupid. Help me get him to the ambulance."

The two attendants had already grabbed a stretcher, rushing toward me with their white coats flapping.

But I fainted, and the next thing I remember, I was on my back inside the ambulance. Its siren wailed. The ambulance was jolting down the dirt road to the back way into town.

I saw the bandages that the attendants were preparing and the intravenous they had stuck into my arm. I saw my mother crouched beside me, wiping my brow.

"That road equipment," Mom was saying, puzzled. "What's it doing on our farm? Your father will be angry."

"Mom, it's a long story," I said weakly.

My last conscious thought was that the Caterpillar would by now have pushed the house down, that the evidenc of her attempt to murder would have been destroyed. When I was well, I knew I'd be able to control her, that in time she'd learn to like the place I had rented for her. In the meanwhile, I had done my duty. I had been my mother's loyal son. Through swollen lips I tried to grin. Then I drifted and couldn't even hear the siren's wail.

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a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

In his essay, "Faces of Envy," Leslie H. Farber says, "As an actor with many faces, envy may try to pass itself off as its exact opposite—namely, admiration." As witness the play between the worldly, successful Rebecca Walsh Berger and Rosalie Appleby, her next-door neighbor on Manhattan's Upper West Side . . .

THE WOMAN I ENVIED

by GEORGE BAXT

I'd have left my husband except I loved our apartment. I suppose that sounds like a facetious statement, but it happens to be quite honest. We married almost forty years ago when falling in love and marrying was less expensive. Abner was considered a genius and I was looked upon as an oddity. I had read Marx and Engels when others were reading Tiffany Thayer and Edna Ferber. We were both twenty years of age and we married in haste because there was a war hanging over our heads like the sword of Damocles. My best friend offered us her studio for a honeymoon, then Abner went off to war—the European theater (theater, what a tame appelation for that bloody arena!)—leaving behind a pregnant bride. Rebecca Berger, aged twenty. Another kind friend gave me a job as a clerk in his bookstore on the Upper West Side of my beloved New York City. I had no idea at the time, and this is the truth, that it was a Communist front. I just thought it was intellectually advanced and I met a lot of interesting people, some of whom went on to literary and theatrical fame, some to notoriety, and most to oblivion. I wish I had joined the oblivions but it's too late now.

My baby was born on Christmas Eve and that made me feel biblical, so I called him Aaron Moses. I went back to work almost

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immediately, except this time as the editor at a small publishing house that specialized in what would some years in the future be referred to as inflammatory and anti-American. Actually, some what we published was quite good and about a dozen of the books are today represented on the back lists of other houses. Of course, they're no longer radical. They're minor classics.

When the war was over and Abner came home to our vast barn of an apartment on Riverside Drive where the rent was delightfully modest, we were, like too many other wartime couples, strangers. He took pride in our son, who was now three years old and resented this peculiar older man's intrusion, but he didn't quite relish living off his wife, who was now earning a healthy salary. There was also a live-in housekeeper, Natasha Brown, a lovely black lady whose mother had named her after Rudolph Valentino's second wife, Natasha Rambova. I thought that was rather cute. Abner said it was degrading and once he said it I knew we were going to be in trouble.

My name was becoming an important one in literary circles. Rebecca Walsh Berger. I had found, nursed, and published an impressive list of young writers. No need to inscribe them here. You can buy my autobiography when it comes off the presses next autumn. Anyway, my life, my triumphs and my tragedies, are not what this story is all about. What I'm doing now is laying the groundwork so you'll understand the horror I shall eventually unveil.

In time, because I worked very hard at it, Abner and I grew comfortable together. It wasn't the youthful passion of our courting days, but what there was was serviceable. I introduced Abner to a film producer who was negotiating the rights to one of my writer's novels—Jack Dresden's remarkable *Bloody Castanets,* about Franco and the Spanish Civil War, which of course was never filmed because the Franco government protested vehemently—and they took to each other immediately. Norman Lubin, the producer, took Abner to Hollywood, where they traded their lofty beliefs and ideals for a series of innocent, inane comedies that made Mr. Lubin a millionaire and provided Abner with a steady income. He wasn't a good enough business man to demand a percentage, but then not being good enough was always Abner's shortcoming. Still, he began to earn the respect of the film industry, which was not yet reeling from the shattering competition the television industry would soon offer.

And since he was spending most of his time on the West Coast and I spent most of my time on the East Coast, we both took lovers.

But by the time our son Aaron went off to private school, Natasha

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had left me and I was alone. No son, no housekeeper, no husband, no lover. There was plenty to occupy my mind, however. There was something called the House Unamerican Activities Committee, for instance. The witch hunt found Abner and me among the victims. Abner's innocuous films were somehow branded Communistic. (Watching them occasionally on late-night television I'm still astonished at how lamebrained those scripts were.) And while loathsome gossip columnists were pilorying Abner on the West Coast, I was being assailed in the East as the Red Queen. My company bravely stood by me and ignored the hundreds of anonymous phone calls and hate letters directed at me. But when poor Abner was sent to jail for refusing to name names, the jig, as they sometimes say, was up. Actually, I would have dug in my heels and continued resisting, but then Aaron was brutally beaten by some of his classmates because his mother and father were "dirty Commy reds."

I removed him from school. I visited Abner in jail. I couldn't kiss him goodbye because there was a glass barrier between us, but then there had always been barriers between us. I sublet our gorgeous apartment to a dimwitted young woman who was earning a fortune writing books about her funny funny life as a school teacher. (You might remember Rachel Goddard. She was stabbed to death by one of her students after he learned how to read.) I took Aaron to England, and after a few months of hardship I set up a television producing company. In five years I was a millionaire. Aaron was my associate producer, the youngest in the business. (After serving a year and a day in jail, poor Abner got a job managing a luncheonette in Queens. He couldn't get a passport to join us in London.)

I held onto the Riverside Drive apartment and when the building went cooperative I bought it for what would be considered a steal today. In a letter from my then tenant Miss Goddard I learned that the apartment next door had been bought by a psychiatrist, Daniel Ostrer. Well, it was certainly big enough to be divided into offices and residence. But why did I feel uneasy as I read and reread Rachel Goddard's letter about Doctor Ostrer? I didn't know the man, let alone what he looked like. I did know from Rachel that he was in his early forties, that his wife was a quiet woman named Ethel, and that they had a teenaged daughter named Rosalie who was very polite when encountered in the hallway or the elevator. Rachel also let me know that a laundry room had been installed in the basement.

Abner now had his passport but no inclination to join me in London. Instead he went to Hollywood again. At about the same time,

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Aaron decided it was time to fly the nest and he too took wing for Hollywood, where you all know he became a multimillionaire television producer (due in part to his lack of any taste). In London, my world slowly disintegrated. My lawyers robbed me of almost all my millions (without even knowing the numbers of the Swiss accounts) and the type of television I was producing fell out of favor. It was time to go home. All the witch hunters were dead. And so was my tenant, Miss Goddard.

When I returned to New York, I wasn't exactly poverty-stricken. I still owned residual interests in my television series and there were the dozens of paintings I had bought in Europe in addition to my strongbox filled with jewelry. And in no time Dame Fortune once again favored me through a new East Coast film company, the owner of which, Dominic D'amigo, persuaded me to join as a full partner once we began our affair. It didn't bother me that I then became known as "The Queen of Pornography."

But then, right after I redid the apartment from top to bottom, Dominic was found at the wheel of his car in a parking lot in Canarsie with four bullets in his head. And right after I took possession of the film company, Abner came home from Hollywood to die.

"It's terminal," he told me, "and I'm frightened."

I put my arms around him and kissed him on the lips. Oh, his hair was white and there was a pink tonsure that was a bit shiny when the sun hit it and his face was wrinkled and his skin was the color of a baked potato and his hands trembled and he hadn't done anything of note professionally in years, but I knew I'd take care of him. I didn't realize he might go into years of remission, which he did, and become such a painful thorn in my side.

And I was tired. Very tired.

One day as I left the apartment, locked the door behind me, and crossed to the elevator, the door to the adjoining apartment opened and out stepped a very pretty woman with two children, a boy and a girl. I guessed the woman to be in her early thirties and the boy and the girl about six or seven years' old, possibly twins. The elevator came and I held the door open while the woman attended to the four locks on her door. I only had one lock because I'd long ago assumed a devil-may-care attitude toward the percentages in being robbed or mugged on the street.

"Oh, thank you so much," she said in a velvet voice as she herded the youngsters into the elevator. The children smiled politely, but there was something weird about them. They were too perfectly

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behaved. They didn't chatter or misbehave the way most kids that age do. He was a perfect little gentleman and she was a perfect little lady—and the mother, now that I got a closer look at her, was perfection. Not a hair out of place, just a trace of makeup on her face because with that glorious skin who needed artificial embellishments? Her suit was exquisite and magnificently tailored. It had cost plenty. I introduced myself.

She smiled and said almost shyly, "I'm Rosalie Appleby. This is my son Nicholas and this is my daughter Evangeline." Nicholas smiled and Evangeline hung her head. With a name like that, I didn't blame her. "You've been back from England quite a white now, haven't you?"

I told her yes and asked if she knew what had become of the doctor who had had her apartment.

"That was my father. Doctor Ostrer. He was a psychoanalyst. He and mother went to live in Florida after his breakdown, so my husband, the children, and I moved in. Daddy gave the place to us." I felt there was something she wanted to ask me, but we had arrived at the lobby. She let me precede her family out of the elevator. The doorman, who was an Iranian student, held the door open for us and we walked out into a blaze of sunshine.

"Going shopping?" I asked her.

"Just to the supermarket," she said. Dressed to the nines just to go to the supermarket? "Are you going to your office?"

"Yes, I am."

"I wish I was going to an office." Had her voice trembled then? I'm not sure. It was so many months ago. I only remember being preoccupied with why the doorman had suddenly held the door open for us when usually I had to struggle with it on my own while he concentrated on his comic book. Then I remembered. It was only seven weeks until Christmas.

"I've never had a job," Rosalie Appleby said wistfully.

"You *have* a job," I told her, "you're a mother. You're raising two perfectly lovely children." I tried not to sound like Betty Furness giving a consumer report, but I wasn't succeeding. What I was saying I was saying halfheartedly. She obviously felt trapped. *Felt* trapped, hell, she *was* trapped. Of all the strange times and places for me to have a sudden and much-needed flash of self-awareness—at that moment I realized what a lucky woman I had been. Despite the trials, the tribulations, the vicissitudes, and mental tortures I had endured, I understood now that I had lived one hell of an exciting

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life. And that I would like nothing better than to change places with her!

I said it out loud. "I wish I was going to the supermarket with my children. I wish I was a young married woman with a loving husband. Oh, dear Mrs. Appleby, count your blessings."

"You're so sweet," she said. "I hope we get to know each other better." Then she took the children each by a hand and they went marching off to the supermarket while I flagged a cab and directed him to my world of carnal sin.

That night when I got home Abner told me Rosalie Appleby had invited us over for a drink. He was stretched out on the couch in the living room, reading a murder mystery and looking very healthy. It was a bit after seven. "Too late now, isn't it?" I asked.

"No," said Abner. "She said she puts the kids to bed at seven."

"Seven! Surely not in this day and age. Only pioneer families put their children to bed at seven."

"Please, Rebecca." His voice was suddenly weak and belonged to a martyr. "She said seven. It's after that now. If you're interested in a drink with the Applebys, go ring their bell and join them."

"What about you?"

"I'm not up to it."

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"How do you think a dying man feels?"

"I don't know. I've never been a dying man." I went to the bedroom and changed into a superb new pants suit. When I returned to the living room, Abner was sitting up watching a game show on television. "Change your mind and come with me," I said. "I'd like your opinion of Rosalie Appleby and her children." I told him about my morning encounter.

"No, thanks," he said. "I'd rather watch TV. Are we eating in or out?"

"I'll let you know when I get back."

Rosalie Appleby greeted me like a long lost friend. Victor Appleby was a knockout. He was easily ten or fifteen years older than his wife. Had she married a father figure? He was a stockbroker who jogged five miles every morning before going to work. His hair was chestnut brown and fell in seductive waves around his ears like Prince Valiant. His eyes—magnificent eyes—were Paul Newman-blue and sparkling. His trim mustache married his goatee and he looked as distinguished as a presidential candidate. He was well over six feet, and I could see through his smoking jacket and body-

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hugging trousers that here was a physical specimen to set any maiden's heart aflutter. Or the heart of a next-door neighbor pushing sixty, albeit reluctantly.

And *she* envied *me?*

I forget what we talked about. All I know is that when I finally got back to my own apartment Abner was on the verge of succumbing to starvation. I threw together a meal of hamburger and salad but had little appetite for it. I had fed my full on Victor Appleby.

I saw a lot of the Applebys. Rosalie and I did our laundry together in the basement room most Saturdays. The children remained proper and boring. I had a feeling that they were perplexed not only by adults but by childhood. They never played games. All they did was read books—but I mean very impressive books for their age: Freud and Jung and Norman Mailer. When I asked Rosalie about it, she explained, "They've been precocious since birth." Some explanation.

I often had them in for dinner or brunch or drinks and Victor was most sympathetic to Abner's condition. His father and a younger brother had both succumbed to terminal illnesses. Once, when we were alone in the kitchen, he kissed me lightly on the cheek. I said something stupid like "Thank you, kind sir," but he wasn't blind. He could see my face ablaze with not-too-restrained passion.

Then one day he invited me to lunch. We met at a quiet Italian restaurant in the East Thirties, chosen by him, I'm sure, because it was discreet and we weren't likely to run into mutual acquaintances such as my husband (who wouldn't have given a damn) or his wife (who would have). After our first martini, he got down to cases. Living with Rosalie, it seems, was like living with a timb bomb. She was suicidal and had repressed their children. (I wasn't blind.) I was saving Rosalie's life, Victor said.

"Me? What have I done?"

"You told her you envy her. Rosalie has never been envied. She's like her mother, who always thought every other woman in the world had a better life than she did. She would have traded places with most of her husband's woman patients. Rosalie's the same. Envy, envy, envy! If I hear that word again—"

I reached across the table and took his hand. He reacted warmly. His skin was pure velvet and my mouth went dry. "I'm glad I've helped Rosalie," I managed to say.

Very softly, he said, "Rebecca." For the first time I liked the sound of my name. Then he mentioned a hotel on East Fortieth Street that

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rented rooms by the hour, no questions asked. Lunch was cancelled. We found a more fulfilling sustenance elsewhere.

That afternoon with Victor changed everything. Though I continued to act my role of envying Rosalie, I secretly despised her. Victor and I were stealing hours together wherever and whenever possible. He rented a car and kept it in a garage near our apartment building and we soon knew dozens of motels outside of the city—across the George Washington Bridge in New Jersey, over the Henry Hudson Bridge in Connecticut. If Abner suspected anything, he couldn't care less. If Rosalie suspected anything, she had missed her vocation as an actress.

One Saturday morning, wheeling my soiled laundry from the apartment into the hall, I was astonished to see Rosalie waiting for the elevator, dressed as though she'd been invited to a coronation.

"Hi," I said. "No laundry this morning?"

"No," she answered. "I have an appointment in New Jersey. I've rented a car." That sent a prickle of guilt and apprehension up my spine. "Victor's in Chicago, she added. "The children are with my in-laws."

I almost blurted, "I know Victor's in Chicago—he begged me to meet him there." The elevator arrived and the descent seemed forever.

"You certainly look terrific," I told her. "Where in New Jersey are you heading?"

"Hackensack."

Hackensack! "Why Hackensack?" I said.

"I want to purchase something there."

"Something they only sell in Hackensack?" I wasn't trying to be funny. There was something too weird and other-worldly about our conversation. She didn't reply to my question. We had arrived at the lobby and she was hurrying out. I continued down to the basement.

That night Abner looked all too healthy and I told him so. "I'm getting this new treatment," he explained.

"What new treatment?"

"It was discovered in the mountains of Peru by a missionary for the Seventh Day Adventists. In those parts they live to be over a hundred." I winced and hoped he didn't notice. "It's a culture from goat cheese and llama blood."

"Illegal, I'm sure."

"Well, don't I look better?"

"Yes," I agreed glumly.

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Then we heard the shot. It could have been automobile backfire. But there was no use kidding ourselves—it had come from the next apartment, Rosalie and Victor's apartment. I shouted, "That was gunfire!" We ran into the hall, where we were joined by other neighbors. A man was pounding on the door to the Appleby apartment, shouting something inane like "Open up in there!" The building superintendant, Mr. Janowski, arrived and used his passkey. We followed him into the apartment.

Rosalie was in the den. There was a bullet wound in her head. She was seated at the desk, and except for the blood, she was impeccably attired. On the floor at her feet lay a small handgun—the object, no doubt, that she had gone to Hackensack to purchase.

Abner phoned for the police. Other neighbors came in. A few shrieked with horror, others sobbed. We located Victor in Chicago.

And so that was the end of the woman I envied.

It was in all the newspapers. Victor was shattered by the tragedy. I made the funeral arrangements, though there were relatives and other friends who might have been accommodating.

At the funeral, Victor spoke a lovely eulogy I had ghosted for him. Rosalie's parents, who had flown up from Florida, stood at the graveside, he frail and somewhat tottering, she tall as a flagpole and just as imposing. Contrary to Victor's description, her face reflected strength and positive thinking. It was easier to figure out Rosalie now. After the services, we returned to Victor's apartment, where caterers I had hired served a tasteful lunch complimented by several excellent wines. Over the next few days I supervised the removal of Rosalie's belongings, choosing several worthy charities for the donations.

Abner's new treatment wasn't doing him that much good. It gave him better color, but he was losing weight and energy rapidly. Victor and I no longer had to resort to grubby little motels. We could have our clandestine meetings in his own apartment right next door.

But I found my thoughts dwelling on Rosalie. "Victor," I said one evening. "About Rosalie."

"What about her?"

"Her suicide. Was it anything I said?"

"No, cutie," answered Victor, snuggling me in his arms, "it's what you didn't say."

"What do you mean?"

"From the day we started our affair, you stopped telling her how

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much you envied her. The day before I went to Chicago, she said to me, 'Rebecca has changed. Have you noticed?' I asked her in what way she thought you had changed. She said, 'She's looking younger and younger every day. Her voice has new color in it and her skin seems to have taken on a fresh life. It's as though she and I have changed places. I don't think she envies me any longer. I think she's got what she's wanted.' "

"What did you say to that?"

"I didn't say anything. I went to Chicago."

Well, Abner did die. Although it was expected, it was unexpected. He was found dead sitting on a bench along Riverside Drive where he sometimes sat and fed the pigeons. Victor and I were married and for auld lang syne we spent our wedding night in one of the motels we used to frequent. I sold my business to a syndicate of lascivious Arabs. Now Victor goes to his office and I stay home writing and trying to look after his children. I've sold several short stories, there's my autobiography due next autumn, and at present I'm plotting a very overheated novel.

At first we talked of joining our two apartments into one huge apartment, but Victor decided his held too many memories of Rosalie, so we rented it to a very attractive writer named Miranda Braggiotti. I believe she's famous for several books on the occult and Victor thinks she dabbles in witchcraft.

It's too amusing what happened when I met her at the elevator this morning with Nicholas and Evangeline morosely in tow. She gave us a strange, mysterious look and said to me, "You know something, Mrs. Appleby?" I can hear her voice now—soft, insinuating, somewhat menacing. "I envy you very much."

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a *NEW* short-short by

H. R. F. KEATING

It looked like an easy snatch, especially for Old Pete who'd spent forty years of his misspent life in and out of the nick . . .

A HELL OF A STORY

by H. R. F. KEATING

They snatched the Oil Sheik's kid, exactly as planned, at 11:06 precisely. There were no difficulties. The girl they'd got for the job distracted the boy's bodyguard for just long enough. The boy himself reacted to the little flying helicopter on a string just as they'd calculated he would. But then a kid of eight, and an Arab from the sticks first time in London, that part couldn't have gone wrong. Worth every penny of all it had cost, that toy.

Everything else had gone like clockwork too. No traffic hold-ups when they were moving away from the Park. No trouble in the change-over of cards. No one about in the mews to see it, and not a bit of fuss out of the lad. Quiet, big-eyed, doing what he was told, scared to death most likely.

So inside half an hour he was safely in the room they'd prepared for him in the old house waiting for demolition up over Kilburn way. No one had spotted them taking him in. He hadn't had time to see enough of the outside of the place to remember it again when they'd got the cash and let him go. And Old Pete was there minding him. Dead right for the job.

Forty years in and out of the nick had soured Old Pete to such a point that anybody who met him accidentally began at once to think how they could get away. No one would come poking their nose into the Kilburn place when there was sixteen stone of Old Pete there, fat but hard, never much of a one for shaving, always a bit of a smell

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to him. The kid was in as safe hands as could be while they conducted the negotiations.

They put in the first call to the rented Mayfair house at six o'clock that evening when they calculated the Sheik would have had just about enough time to have unpleasant thoughts and be ready quietly to agree to dodge the police and pay up. "The kid's safe," they said. "He'll be having his supper now. He's being well looked after."

It was true. Old Pete was just going into the room with the boy's supper, baked beans and a cup of tea, prepared on the picnic stove they'd put into the place. The boy looked at the extraordinary food—extraordinary to him—without seeming to be much put out by it. Old Pete even grunted a question at him, which he hadn't meant to. Only the kid's calm was a bit unexpected. It threw Old Pete a little. "All right, are you?" he grunted.

The boy looked at him, his large dark eyes clear and unwavering.

"Will you mind being in Hell?" he asked.

Old Pete, lumbering toward the door with its dangling padlock, stopped dead in his tracks and turned round.

"English," he said dazedly. "English. You speak English."

"Of course I do," the boy replied. "I always speak English with the Adviser. Talking with me is all he has to do, now my father has the oil and doesn't need advice any more."

Old Pete, crafty enough in his way but not one for confronting new situations easily, stood blinking, trying to fit this into the framework of his knowledge. And there was something else. Something at the back of his mind that had to be dealt with too. And it was that, surprisingly, that pushed itself forward first.

" 'Ere," he said suddenly, "what d'you mean 'Hell'?"

"Will you mind being in Hell forever?" the boy asked.

"What d'you mean, me being in Hell?"

"Well, you will have to go there. Kidnaping is a sin. If you commit sins you go to Hell."

The simple, fundamental philosophy of the desert fell like drops of untarnished water from his lips.

Old Pete, motor-tire tummied, dirt-engrimed, looked at the kid for a long while without speaking a word. Then at last the machinery of his mind ground out his answer.

"Look, lad," he said, "that's all gone out. They finished with all that. Word may've not got round to where you come from, but they found out all that's wrong. Just tales. You know, what ain't so."

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He stood, bending forward a little, examining the slight form of the boy in his neat, expensive Western shirt and shorts.

"Yes," he said, ramming it home, "you take my word for it, lad. That's all past-times stuff now. Gone and forgotten."

He made his way out, an evil-smelling forty-ton tank, and carefully refitted the padlock to the little secure room.

But the next morning, when the Sheik was still holding out and the rest of them were considering what would be the easiest way of putting the pressure on a bit, the boy proved not to have absorbed the latest developments in Western thought at all. When Old Pete brought him his breakfast, the kid accepted the big bowl of corn flakes eagerly enough, but in his conversation he was making no concessions to modernity.

"You will go to Hell, you know," he said, picking up from where they had left off. "You have to—you've done wrong."

"But I told yer," said Old Pete. "They changed all that."

"You can't," the boy said, with all the calm certainty of someone pointing out an accidental breach in the rules of a game. "If you do something wrong, you have to be punished for it. Isn't that so?"

"Well, I don't know about that," said Pete. "I mean, the cops don't always catch you. Not if you're sharp. They're not going to catch us for this lot, that's for sure. Those boys has it worked out a right treat."

"Yes," said the Sheik's son, "but that's just the reason."

"Just the reason?"

"Yes, if you do not get caught and punished here, you must be punished when you are dead. When you cross the Bridge of Al Sirat, which is only as wide as the breadth of a hair, the weight of your sin makes you fall. Into Hell."

His large brown eyes looked steadily into Pete's battered face.

"It's forever, of course," the boy added.

Old Pete left the room in too much of a hurry to collect last night's dirty baked-beans plate.

He did not come back at lunchtime as he had meant to do. But at about six that evening—when the Sheik after talk of making life hard for the boy had just caved in and promised to deliver the cash—Old Pete once more removed the heavy padlock on the door and entered with another plate of steaming baked beans. The boy said nothing but seized eagerly on the beans. Old Pete turned to the door. But then he stopped, and began to gather up the two previous

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lots of dirty crockery. The boy ate steadily. Pete picked up the plates and put them down again. At last he broke out.

"Forever?" he said.

"Of course," the boy answered, knowing at once what they were talking about. "If you go to Paradise forever if you've been good, then you must go to Hell forever if you've been bad."

"Yeah," said Pete. And after a little he added, "Stands to reason, I suppose."

He put the now emptied second baked-beans plate on top of the others.

"I'm not meant to tell yer," he said, "but you'll be going back 'ome soon. Yer old man's coming up with the dibbins."

"It won't make any difference," the boy said, again answering an unspoken question.

Pete blundered out of the room, snapping the big padlock closed with a ferocious click. And entirely forgetting the dirty crockery.

But he was back within twenty minutes.

"Look," he said. "If I'd forgotten to lock the door when I brought you your nosh just now, you could've sneaked out and nobody the wiser."

"No," said the boy. "You must *take* me home, all the way. Otherwise it wouldn't count."

Sweat broke out under the dirt of Pete's broad, fat-bulged face. "I can't do that. They'd catch me. Catch me for sure."

At the steps leading up to the door of the big corner house in Mayfair the boy turned to his companion.

"All right," he said. "I will ring myself. You can go now."

Pete swung away and lumbered off round the corner, fast as if he was a tanker lorry out of control on an ice-slippery hill. But his legs were too jelly-like to support him for long, and once safely round the corner out of sight, he just had to stop and lean against the tall iron railing and let the waves of trembling flow over him.

For two whole minutes he did nothing but lean there, shaking. Then he began to relieve his feelings in dredging up from a well-stored memory every foul word he had ever heard. He only came to a halt, after some ten minutes, in order to draw breath.

When he did so the cool, clear, horribly familiar voice of the boy spoke from the open window over his head.

"I'm afraid with all that you will have to go to Hell after all," the boy said.

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a *NEW* Henry Turnbuckle story by

JACK RITCHIE

How and where can a professional killer meet four different people who want their wives dead? Especially wealthy wives? . . . Pure, unadulterated Ritchie, with a feast of "sheer, relentless deduction" by one of our favorite Henrys . . .

MURDER OFF LIMITS

by JACK RITCHIE

"Ralph," I said, "during the last five months four women have met violent deaths. I am convinced that they were murdered by the same man."

"Henry, whenever we run across a chain murderer, hasn't he always been thoughtful enough to send us letters either before he murders, or after? We haven't gotten any letters."

"Nor are we likely to, Ralph. The very last thing in the world this man wants is for us to know that he is operating in the vicinity."

"What four women?" Ralph asked.

I opened a large brown envelope and took out the Xeroxed copies of the newspaper clippings. "In order of their demise, five months ago a Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson was shot and killed in her home in Fox Point. The police there concluded that she had been killed by an intruder, perhaps a burglar. A month later a Mrs. Elaine Whitecliff, of Grafton, was bludgeoned to death in her bedroom. Again the authorities assumed an intruder. Six weeks ago a Mrs. Emily Kearney met her death while walking her grounds. She was strangled. And the day before yesterday a Mrs. Marianne Trestle received fatal stab wounds while in her gazebo reading *Better Homes and Gardens.*"

"So what ties them together?"

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"Ralph, it was not until this last murder that a suspicion formed in my mind that there was something drastically wrong. I don't save newspaper items—except for an occasional recipe—so to refresh my memory I went to the morgue at the *Journal,* reread the accounts of the murders, and then had them Xeroxed."

Ralph waited patiently.

"Each of the victims was married and in each case the husband had a perfect alibi for the time of the murder. Thompson was giving a speech at a banquet, Whitecliff playing bridge with some business associates, Kearney at a board meeting, and Trestle at his country-club golf course in a foursome which included a federal judge. The newspaper accounts mentioned these facts because, I suppose, everyone automatically suspects the husband in the case of wife murder, and they wanted to get that point out of the way immediately."

Ralph shrugged. "So they had alibis. What's wrong with that?"

"But *four* murders of four *rich* women, and *four* husbands with perfect alibis?" I chuckled significantly. "That's just too much coincidence to swallow."

"And so you think they were all murdered by some nut with something against rich women?"

"Not quite that, Ralph. No, four murders of four rich women whose husbands had perfect alibis all point to one thing. A *hired* killer. A professional murderer."

Ralph dragged his feet as he accompanied me to Captain Johnson's office.

The captain listened to my story, read the copies of the clippings, and then looked at the ceiling.

"Henry, didn't you notice that every one of the victims was killed in a suburb? In other words, it's out of our jurisdiction. It's not our beat."

"But sir," I said in respectful protest, "we can't just ignore this. We can't let it lie there."

"Henry, I'm not going to let it lie there. I'll make a few phone calls to the police departments concerned and let them take it from there. But that's as far as I'm going, Henry. Like I said, it's not our beat."

Ralph and I spent our day on more local matters. At the end of our shift, however, I had made up my mind. "Ralph, I simply cannot leave those murders alone. Do you realize how difficult it is to get *two* suburban police departments to coordinate, much less four? What this case needs is one brain, one central intelligence to pull all the pieces together."

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"Henry, the captain said no."

"I'll be doing this on my own time, Ralph, and at no cost to the department. Tomorrow is my day off."

When I got home to my apartment, I went through my recipe drawer until I found the clipping for chipped beef casserole and made supper. After eating and then doing the dishes, I put my Beethoven String Quartets on the record player and sat in my easy chair. I filled and lit my meerschaum and proceeded to cogitate.

Investigating the murders by the direct approach was out. My alien presence would certainly antagonize the suburban police. No, I must remain out of professional channels. I must solve the murders largely through sheer relentless deduction—a course which did not daunt me in the least.

Four men had hired someone to rid them of their wives, for one reason or another. Was it possible that these four men had hired four *different* killers? Possible, yes. Probable, no. Until proved otherwise, I would work on the assumption that they all hired the same man.

If I wanted to hire someone to kill my wife—if I had one—how would I go about it? How would I find *anybody* to kill her, much less a professional killer? Certainly one couldn't go about asking people if they were professional killers or knew of one available.

No, wasn't it more likely—or at least worthy of consideration—that the professional killer did the seeking? Found his customers?

If I were a professional killer, I would very likely have to do a lot of traveling, wouldn't I? Besides the danger of remaining in one region too long, there was also the probability that one could drain an area dry of prospects.

Yes, I would have to travel. Perhaps a year in one part of the country and then move on. But how would I find my clients? Wealthy ones, of course. Not that the poor and the middle classes are immune to the urge to kill their wives, but one must go where the real money was.

How does one go about soliciting murder from the rich? Does one barge into their offices or boardrooms and ask them if they want their wives eliminated? Of course not.

No, one would have to meet them under more relaxed and private circumstances. Over a drink, perhaps. Or quite a few drinks. Where would that be? How can a professional killer meet four different people who want their wives dead?

I frowned over the newspaper clippings again and then I thought

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I had the answer. Trestle had been on the Raddison Country Club's golf course at the time his wife was being murdered. What better place to hobnob with the rich than at a country club? Especially at the nineteenth hole.

Did all four of the involved husbands by any chance belong to the *same* country club? That was worth checking out.

I turned to the yellow pages of the phone book, found the listings for country clubs, and then dialed.

A neutral voice, probably an employee's, answered the phone. "Raddison Country Club."

"I'm from out of town," I said. "I'm supposed to meet James Whitecliff at his country club. But unfortunately Jimmy forgot to tell me *which* country club he belongs to and so I've been phoning around. Do you have a James Whitecliff as a member?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I have him paged?"

"You needn't bother. I'll be there in a little while. Oh, by the way, while I'm at it, I believe another one of my friends belongs to your club too. Franklin Kearney?"

"Yes, sir. I just saw him going into the bar."

"Thank you." I hung up.

Well, well, so Trestle, Whitecliff, and Kearney belonged to the same club. I thought that for now I could assume that Thompson did too, though I would verify that tomorrow.

I slept rather well that night, and in the morning, after breakfast, went down to my car.

It was a forty-minute drive to the Raddison Country Club. A small, almost inconspicuous, sign at the driveway entrance reminded one that this was a private country club, but there was no gate or gatekeeper to enforce any restriction. I drove up to the main building, parking in a well-shaded parking lot, and entered the structure via the bar.

I spoke to the small elderly bartender. "Could you tell me where I might find the secretary of the club?"

"Mr. Tarleton? I haven't seen him for a couple of days."

"Oh," I said, wondering where to go from there.

He studied me for a moment. "You want to see him on club business?"

"Well, yes."

"In that case you might want to see O'Higgins. Mr. Tarleton is a club member and has the title, but O'Higgins does the work. He's

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paid. Like me. His office is on the lower level, turn right where you came in."

I retraced my steps and did as directed, walking a narrow dim corridor to the door reading *Secretary*.

I found a small cluttered office and a tall man with a slightly harried expression on his face.

"Yes, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Can you tell me if a Mr. Mathew Thompson belong to this club?"

He debated with himself for a moment as to whether that might be top secret or not and then nodded. "Yes, sir. He does."

That linked the quartet. "This is a restricted club, isn't it?"

His eyes showed sudden worry. "By *no* means, sir. We have two Jewish, one Mohammedan, two blacks, and one—"

I held up a hand. "I meant restricted in *numbers*."

He was relieved. "Yes, sir. We keep our membership steady at three hundred. And their dependents, of course."

"And when a vacancy occurs, you fill that vacancy?"

"Yes, sir. When somebody dies, or leaves the area, or simply resigns, though very few people have ever done anything that radical."

"And how do you fill these vacancies? From applications on file?"

"Well, not quite, sir. The new member has to be recommended by at least three members. Then he is interviewed by the Admissions Panel and a decision is made."

I had hit a snag. How the devil could a professional murderer get three recommendations to join an exclusive club?

I pondered while O'Higgins watched, apprehension returning. Then I had it. Of course. One of our murderer's previous clients, say in Philadelphia, would be persuaded to write a letter to someone he knew well, let us say in the Milwaukee area, saying in effect that a very good friend of mine is moving out your way and I'd appreciate it if you could get him into your club.

And this Milwaukee-area friend would rustle up two other members and they would proceed to recommend the murderer for membership. It did not matter whether any of the three was a prospective client or not. What mattered was that now the murderer was ready to set up shop in a new location.

"Could I see your membership list? I'm interested primarily in any members who have joined in the last year."

O'Higgins now stonewalled. "Sir, just who *are* you?"

I had been hoping he wouldn't ask the question, but since he did, I showed him the badge in my wallet. I pocketed it again before he

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could squint close enough to make out *Milwaukee Police Department.* "Detective-Sergeant Henry Turnbuckle," I said, realizing too late that it might have been wiser to use an alias.

O'Higgins went to a filing cabinet and brought back a folder. He pulled out a list and pointed. "In the last year there have been only four new members."

I read the names, which meant nothing to me. "Could you give me a one- or two-sentence rundown on each of these people?"

"Well, Livingston is one of the Sheboygan Livingstons. They manufacture plumbing fixtures. Neilson is from a pioneer Fox Point family. Yarrow is a Grafton attorney and investment counselor. And Netterly just moved here from St. Louis. I don't know anything about him, but three of our members recommended him highly. He spends a lot of time here at the club. I guess he just likes to meet people."

I smiled grimly. "How true."

I went back upstairs to the bar and took a stool. "A glass of sherry, please."

The bartender regarded me dubiously and then began opening cupboard doors. After a while he came up with a bottle. "We don't get much call for this any more. Not even from women."

As I sipped my glass, I studied the bar mirror, which in turn gave me a view of the room's tables. At this early time of the day there were only a half a dozen other people in the room.

I spoke to the bartender again. "Would you happen to know if Mr. Netterly is in the clubhouse this morning?"

He pointed. "That's him over there at the table next to the terrace windows."

Netterly was a heavy-set individual of indeterminate middle age, sitting alone and looking bored.

I took my glass to the French window near him and stared out at the vista beyond. I sighed heavily. Twice.

"Something bothering you, buddy?" Netterly asked. He indicated a chair. "Sit down. I hate to drink alone."

I introduced myself as Edward Carson and we indulged in cautious banalities for about five minutes, feeling each other out, so to speak, and then, after another sigh, I came to the point. "It's the wife."

"The wife?"

"She's running around with another man. I don't know who he is, but I know he's there. And I suspect that there may even be more than one."

He sympathized. "Have you done any thinking about a divorce?"

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I laughed bitterly. "Divorce? She'd take me for all I have. When I met her, I practically picked her up out of the gutter. My family disapproved of her. Everybody did, but I wouldn't listen. Now that it's too late, I know better. I'd do almost anything to get rid of her. Sometimes I get wild ideas, like getting a gun and blowing her head off."

"Now that wouldn't solve your problem. Not unless you like going to jail."

I downed my glass in one magnificent swoop. "You wouldn't by any chance know anybody I could hire to kill my wife?"

His eyes definitely flickered. "Are you serious?"

"You're damn right I'm serious. Serious enough to pay fifty thousand to get the job done."

I let a few seconds ride by and then rose. "I'm sure there must be somebody out there willing to do the job and I'm going to go looking for him."

Netterly raised a hand. "Now just a minute there, buddy. Let's talk this over. Have another glass of what you're drinking." The bartender responded to his signal and brought us refills.

Netterly sipped his bourbon. "You're absolutely serious about hiring somebody to kill your wife?"

"Absolutely."

"It isn't just the alcohol talking?"

"No."

"And you'd pay fifty thousand dollars?"

"In cash."

He rubbed his jaw and still stared at me. "Well, I just *might* know somebody who'd do the job for you."

"Who?" I asked cagily.

He committed himself. "Me."

Obviously I could not arrest him on the spot. I had no actual proof that he had just accepted my offer. It would be my word against him. Therefore I would have to get the proof. "I don't happen to have that much money on me right now."

"I didn't expect you to."

"But I can get it. I'll meet you here again at two o'clock this afternoon."

He smiled. "I'll be waiting."

I drove to police headquarters where I requisitioned a small tape recorder which fitted neatly into my inside breast coat-pocket. The

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microphone was cleverly concealed in an inconspicuous Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks button in my left lapel.

I cut up newspapers to the size of dollar bills until I had a stack approximately three inches high. I wrapped it in brown paper, sealing the package with Scotch tape.

I met Netterly again at two o'clock at the Raddison Country Club. The place was a bit more crowded now and we took a table in an alcove.

"By the way," I said, staring disapprovingly at my digital wristwatch, "do you have the correct time?"

He glanced at his own timepiece. "It's exactly two."

I pretended to make adjustments. "This is September the fifteenth, isn't it?"

He nodded. "September the fifteenth, 1981."

I finished with my watch. "Well, let's get down to business. You haven't changed your mind, or anything? You're still going to kill my wife for me?"

"Yes."

"And you want fifty thousand dollars for the job?"

"Yes, fifty thousand dollars."

I put the package on the table. "I'm rather bad at remembering names. Did you say that your name is Clarence Netterly?"

"That's right. The name is Clarence Netterly." He picked up the package and hefted it.

I smiled. "And now I, known to you as Edward Carson, give to you at two o'clock P.M. on September the fifteenth, 1981, fifty thousand dollars to murder my wife."

"You put it in a nutshell, buddy."

I took out my wallet, preparatory to showing him my badge and making the arrest.

Netterly seemed to signal to two men at a table just outside of our alcove. They rose as one and approached. "Mr. Edward Carson," one of them said, "you are under arrest for soliciting the murder of your wife." He prepared to read me my rights.

I interrupted immediately and pointed an accusing finger at Netterly. "There is your man. The *solicitee* is the man you want."

Netterly opened his jacket, revealing a tape recorder very similar to mine. His microphone appeared to be cleverly concealed in an inconspicuous Rotary International Club button on his left lapel.

He regarded me reprovingly. "I thought I'd just go along with your offer before you went out and got somebody who really would kill

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your wife. I figured this was the only way to stop you. I've got it all down here on tape."

"Officers," I said, feeling a bit warm, "we are all the victims of a misunderstanding. I have no wife and my name isn't Edward Carson. Actually I happen to be a detective-sergeant with the Milwaukee Police Department."

The two plainclothes men studied my badge and one of them shrugged. "So you got a police badge in a wallet. That don't have to mean that you're this Henry Turnbuckle. The wallet could be stolen."

We were attracting a crowd. I cleared my throat. "Look, I'm sure we can straighten this out in a more private place."

The four of us adjourned to a small anteroom where I learned that I had just met Sergeant Morrison and Acting-Detective O'Reilly.

Morrison's eyes were cold. "You're in trouble, mister, even if you are this Henry Turnbuckle. Why are you operating on our turf? Isn't Milwaukee big enough for you or do you think we can't handle our job?"

"On the contrary," I said swiftly, "I think your department is doing a magnificent job. Always has been and always will. Very professional."

While I was thinking of how to explain my presence in their territory gracefully, O'Reilly left the room. He returned shortly. "I phoned the Milwaukee Police Department. There's a Captain Johnson coming right over to see if he can identify you."

I closed my eyes. "Now that wasn't at *all* necessary. The captain is a *busy* man. We could have thrashed this out all by ourselves."

Captain Johnson made his appearance twenty minutes later. He walked slowly around my chair three or four times and then stepped back to study me. "Yes," he said after thirty seconds of scrutiny, "that's Henry all right. I'd swear to it."

Frankly I don't know why it took him so long to identify me.

He smiled. "Well, well, Henry, so you got yourself into a little trouble?"

I was allowed to leave after I promised Captain Johnson that I would report to his office bright and early the next morning for appropriate disciplinary action.

On my way home I bought a bottle of sherry. It was the second one this year.

In the evening I was hard at work on a Sunday-sized crossword puzzle when Ralph appeared at my door.

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He beamed. "Henry, I see you done it again. Led us right to the murderer. He's now in custody."

I blinked and then recovered my aplomb. "Ah, ha. Just as I suspected. Netterly is the killer after all. However, he suspected a trap and so very cannily used a ploy to throw the hounds of justice off the tracks."

"No, Henry. The murderer isn't Netterly."

Not Netterly? Then if it wasn't Netterly who in the world could it be? I smote my forehead soundly. But, of course. *O'Higgins.* The club's working secretary. *He* would be in a position to know all the club members and their problems. I chuckled. "Off hand, I venture to say that the murderer's name is *O'Higgins.*"

"No, Henry. Not O'Higgins either. Lionel Casterbridge."

"Lionel Casterbridge?"

Ralph believed in stringing it out. "After you left the country club, Captain Johnson decided he might as well go to the bar and have a quick one. He recognized the bartender and remembered that he should still be on parole. And when you're on parole, the last job in the world you're allowed to get is bartending. So Johnson introduced himself. The bartender got pale, began shaking, and looked like he was going to run or faint. In other words, he overreacted. So Johnson figured he might have more here than just a parole violation. He took the man aside and began asking questions. The bartender wasn't the kind who can stand any pressure. He stumbled all over his toes, let a few things slip, and then finally cracked wide-open."

I grasped the situation. "And the bartender's name is Lionel Casterbridge?"

"No, Henry. Charley Stevens."

I exerted magnificent control over my temper. "Then who the devil is this Lionel Casterbridge?"

"He and Stevens were cellmates in Waupon and got paroled at about the same time. When Stevens got his bartending job he started listening to the customers and then got a bright idea. People will tell bartenders more things than they would a psychiatrist. He just collected his information and passed it on to Casterbridge, who made the personal contacts, did the negotiating, and handled the killings. They split the take fifty-fifty."

Ralph smiled. "The captain says you can forget about reporting to his office tomorrow morning. All is forgiven."

I went to the window and looked out at the dismal stars in the dismal night.

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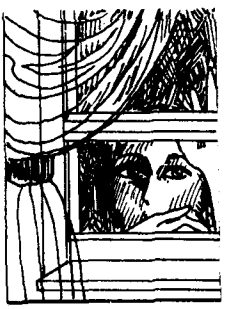
"Henry," Ralph said, "you ought to go out more. See people. Live the Book of Life."

"Ralph, one cannot live the Book of Life. One barely has time enough to read the Table of Contents, much less thumb through the Index. Besides, I had an uncle who died of gusto. It's a horrible way to go."

Nevertheless I poured myself another glass of sherry.



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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Every so often Mr. Hoch gives us a short story with an especially complex plot, even more fully packed than usual, with no sacrifice of fast pace or surprising action. These particular short stories could easily be expanded to novelets, with no apparent signs of attenuation or padding. But Mr. Hoch is partial to the short-story length, and we are grateful to him for that preference. It means that the mysterious circumstances of the story are more baffling, the development more unexpected, the suspense more tingling, when the story is told in about 7,000 words. Happy reading!

THE SPY AT THE FILM FESTIVAL

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Cecil Robbins threw open the windows of his suite at Stockholm's Grand Hotel and stood for a moment watching the gulls dip low over the water. It was the first day of the Scandia Film Festival, which meant that Mrs. Norris would be arriving by plane from London. He would have to meet her, and shepherd her to the hotel, which was a nuisance with the airport forty minutes from the city. His film, *Old World Haunts*, was being shown on the second evening's schedule, which at least allowed time for her to rest up before meeting the press.

He dressed quickly and rang for room service, wanting to avoid the cluster of delegates, reporters, and hangers-on who'd surely be filling the hotel lobby by now. When a knock came at the door ten minutes later he was a bit surprised that breakfast had arrived so quickly, but opened the door without hesitation.

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The man who faced him was tall and slim, somewhere in his early fifties. He wore a conservative gray business suit and carried no tray. "I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Robbins," he said, revealing himself as an educated upper-class Englishman of the sort one often encountered in London government circles. "But I wonder if I might interview you concerning your film."

"I never give interviews before breakfast," Cecil barked, annoyed at the intrusion. "Who are you, anyhow?"

"Name's Jeff Rand," the man said. "I'm reporting on the Festival for *Sight and Sound* magazine."

"All right, all right," Cecil said with a sigh. "Come on in. I might as well talk to you while I'm waiting for my breakfast."

The man named Rand seated himself near the open windows and took a notebook from his pocket. "Now then, what can you tell me regarding *Old World Haunts*?"

"Nothing you don't already know, I'm sure. I wanted to bring the techniques of new-wave film-making to the traditional ghost story, but when I began searching for a suitable literary property I quickly discovered that the ghost stories being written today are merely exercises in savage horror. The studios back in the States are grinding them out for the youth market, and I didn't want to be trapped into emulating that sort of thing. So I collected reports of six recent ghostly sightings from various European countries and dramatized them in a half-dozen segments. I believe it's quite effective, and a decidedly different slant on the filmed ghost story."

Jeff Rand made a few notes and then said, "Didn't I hear that one of the actual women involved in a haunting episode would be on hand for the screening tomorrow?"

Cecil Robbins nodded. "Mrs. Norris. I'm to meet her plane at noon. A nice English lady. Lives a few miles outside Cambridge. I chose her for the press conference because she makes a very good show. No one can listen to her and doubt for an instant that she really did see her neighbor's spirit."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, you'll see it all dramatized in the film. It's the opening segment, actually. She has a little cottage on a country lane outside her village. A man named Goosneck—Herbert Goosneck—lived in a cottage down the road. They were casual friends, though she knew little about him. One day about two years ago Goosneck was struck by a hit-and-run driver while walking along the road to the village pub. He was badly injured and rushed to a hospital in Cambridge.

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"Mrs. Norris telephoned the hospital once or twice, and was told his condition was critical. Then, after about a week's time, she happened to look out her side window and saw Herbert Goosneck, all dressed up, walking along the road toward his cottage. She went outside and called to him, but he didn't seem to hear her. He turned and went into his cottage. She telephoned the hospital to see if he'd been discharged and was told that he'd died two days earlier."

"Interesting," Jeff Rand admitted, "though a bit low-key for a film."

"Oh, that's only one segment, and I think the camera work is quite good on it. If you want something a bit more lively there's a corpse who comes out of the sea at Marsala, and a haunted house in Grenoble."

"I get the idea. But I'd like to interview Mrs. Norris myself, if I could, possibly before the other journalists meet her."

"That might be difficult," Cecil told him. He liked the man, but he was reluctant to give him any special consideration. "The Festival has a press office set up in one of the rooms, and all interviews are supposed to be cleared through it to avoid favoritism."

"Oh, I'm sure they'd give their permission. Why don't you just ring them up?"

Cecil thought the man seemed quite sure of himself. "All right, I can do that. They're using room 457."

He was reaching for the phone when the waiter arrived with the breakfast tray. Cecil tipped him more generously than necessary and then returned to the telephone. He started to dial and then cursed and started over again. "I can't get used to these Swedish phones!"

The Festival press coordinator, Klas Skepsbron, was at the theater arranging last-minute details for the screenings, but an assistant said there'd be no problem about granting an interview with Jeff Rand of *Sight and Sound*. He was on the accredited press list. Cecil hung up with mixed feelings. Rand seemed pleasant enough, but one never knew what these press people would end up writing. Still, Mrs. Norris was well able to take care of herself.

"Everything's settled," he said with a smile, turning from the phone. "You can accompany me to the airport if you wish."

"That would be fine."

For Rand the trip to Stockholm had been the modern equivalent of being shanghaied aboard a sailing ship bound for the Indies.

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Retired from British Intelligence for nearly six years, he still found himself all too susceptible to the pleas of his former superior, Hastings. The Stockholm business was a typical example.

"It's all arranged," Hastings had said. "You'll fly over for two days as a reporter for *Sight and Sound*, the film journal. You're to see the film's director-producer, an Englishman named Cecil Robbins. And hopefully you'll get to interview Mrs. Norris herself."

"She'll be in Stockholm?"

Hastings had nodded. "Robbins' bringing her in to help promote his film. She plays herself in the segment about Goosneck's ghost. And that's the part we're interested in. Herbert Goosneck was a contract employee of British Intelligence and America's C.I.A. He retired from the business with a great deal of knowledge that could be dangerous. I believe only our Official Secrets Act kept him from publishing it during his lifetime. But he's known to have compiled a list of all agents and contract employees with whom he had contact—a list, it's believed, of some three hundred names. Following his death we searched his cottage and found nothing. We assumed the list had been destroyed. Now we learn of this ghost business."

"Do you believe in ghosts?" Rand had asked him. "Perhaps your conscience is bothering you, Hastings. Was it one of your people who ran the old man down?"

"Certainly not! And we don't believe in ghosts. But leaving out the ghost part, what is this woman saying? That she saw a person unknown enter Goosneck's cottage two days after his death."

"She saw *Goosneck* enter his cottage two days after his death."

"It's the same thing."

"Not quite," Rand said, but he didn't press the point.

"So you'll go?"

"You hardly need me for such an assignment."

"Believe me, we need you. It's just your sort of assignment." He'd carefully refilled his pipe and relit it before continuing. "You see, Rand, the truth of the matter is that Goosneck's list is so sensitive we can't trust it to anyone presently in the Service."

"The man's been dead two years!"

"Nevertheless—"

"All right," Rand agreed reluctantly. "Two days and that's it! And I still don't know what it is you think this Mrs. Norris will tell me."

Rand remembered that conversation as he stood next to Cecil Robbins at the arrival gate of Stockholm's Arlanda Airport. Two years after Goosneck's death in a village near Cambridge, this man

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had made a film about a half-dozen ghosts. And Hastings had sent Rand all the way to Stockholm to interview a woman who lived only an hour's ride from London.

His speculation was cut short by the plane's arrival. Mrs. Norris, one of the first passengers off, proved to be an imposing woman in her early sixties, the sort of intimidating British lady whose word one could hardly challenge. "I didn't know I'd be met by the press," she said when Rand had been introduced.

"You have an interesting story," he told her.

"Posh! Half the people I know have seen a ghost at one time or another."

"Suppose we discuss it in the car," Cecil Robbins suggested, gathering up her bags.

On the long drive into Stockholm, Rand found it easy to question her about the ghost, but there was no deviation from the story Hastings had related earlier. Yes, it had been Herbert Goosneck she saw enter the house. No, she'd never seen him that dressed up before, but there was no doubt about her identification.

"Did you see him leave?" Rand asked.

"No. I called the hospital and when they said he'd died two days earlier I knew he wouldn't be coming out of that house. There was no point in watching for him to leave."

"Then you believe in ghosts, Mrs. Norris?"

"I believe in what I see, Mr. Rand." She was a very firm lady.

"But couldn't you have seen someone other than Goosneck?"

She shook her head. "He had Goosneck's way of walking. I'd seen him out that very window for years."

"Tell me about the accident that injured him in the first place."

"Hit and run. Some young fool with too much drink in him, afraid to come forward. They never caught him."

Rand thought about that. "Hit-and-run drivers are generally apprehended quite quickly, simply because of the damage to their cars. If this one remained at large it might indicate a degree of professionalism."

"Funny," Mrs. Norris remarked, "you don't talk like a reporter."

"I try not to," he answered with a smile.

Cecil Robbins interrupted at that point. "I think you can save your other questions until you see the film tomorrow evening, Rand. Mrs. Norris will be available to the press following the screening."

They'd reached downtown Stockholm by that time, and a few moments later the car pulled up in front of the Grand Hotel. "What

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a lovely view!" the Englishwoman observed. "All that water and those little boats! Is the film festival at the hotel?"

"Only the panels and the symposium on Wednesday. The screenings are at two nearby theaters."

As they entered the hotel Rand was accosted by a slim Swedish gentleman whose Festival name-tag identified him as Klas Skepsbron, the press secretary. "Pardon me, Mr. Rand, may I have a word with you?" Like most Swedes under forty he spoke nearly perfect English. Children studied it in Swedish schools from the age of nine.

"Certainly. What's the trouble?"

The Swede smiled apologetically. "There is another correspondent here representing *Sight and Sound* who says she doesn't know you."

"That's easily explained. I'm preparing my report for them on a free-lance basis, sort of an overview of the Festival. I imagine she's reviewing the films being shown."

That seemed to satisfy him. "You may want to contact her in any event. Her name is Susan Wagner and she's in room 230."

"Certainly. I'll do that."

Robbins had finished checking in Mrs. Norris at the registration desk and the bellman was taking her bags upstairs. "Room 346," he announced, bowing slightly as he presented her with the key. "Get rested up from your journey and then we'll have lunch."

She thanked him and disappeared into the elevator. Robbins turned to Rand and dismissed him just as quickly. "No doubt we'll meet at tomorrow evening's screening."

"I'm sure we will," Rand agreed.

The hotel was filled to capacity by the time the preliminary sessions got under way that afternoon. Rand stayed close to the Festival registration desk on the hotel's mezzanine, checking the name-tags of late arrivals. There was a handsome couple from Russia, and a bearded gentleman from France. The press was everywhere, but no one could confirm the persistent rumor that Ingmar Bergman himself might put in an appearance.

"He's in Germany, isn't he?" a pale blonde girl asked, and Rand automatically read her name-tag: *Susan Wagner, Sight & Sound.*

"Hello, there," he said, introducing himself. "Klas Skepsbron said you were wondering about me."

She eyed him up and down. "Yes, I was. Are you sure we're working for the same people?"

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"I'm doing a feature on the Festival. I'm sure we won't be covering the same ground."

"Did Sam hire you?"

"I don't know his name. My agent arranged it."

"I see." She was skeptical but not really suspicious. "Well, I guess we're something like partners, then."

"You're American, aren't you?"

That brought a grin. "How could you tell? Actually, I've spent so much time in England lately I'd have thought my American accent would have disappeared."

"It never does, you know. Not completely."

"Are you a film writer, Mr. Rand?"

"Call me Jeff. Jeffery. No, I'm just a writer, period. Used to be a government bureaucrat, but I much prefer writing."

She opened the program and glanced over the schedule of films. "I'm anxious to see the new Fellini at the opening tonight. What do you think?"

"Oh, some of the newer directors interest me more. Cecil Robbins, for instance. He's showing *Old World Haunts* in competition tomorrow evening."

"The ghost stories? I was reading about that. It seems somewhat old hat, but I'll keep an open mind."

Rand arranged to sit with Susan Wagner at that evening's showing of the new Fellini film—a garish fantasy about a traveling carnival in Italy at the turn of the century. He was not a great moviegoer himself, and the intensity of the discussion following the screening baffled him somewhat.

"What did you think?" Susan asked.

"Interesting, certainly. Fellini is always visually interesting, even when he's repeating his old tricks." It seemed a safe thing to say. "How about a drink at the bar back at the hotel?"

"At those prices? Is the magazine paying your expenses?"

Rand smiled. "This one will be on me."

It was nearly eleven as they settled down with their drinks back at the Grand. The midsummer night was only just beginning to fall, with the sky still a vibrant blue. Rand felt good and he tried not to think about what had brought him to Stockholm.

"I have a bottle in my room," Susan Wagner remarked after their first drink. "It's far less expensive than this."

"That's the best idea I've heard tonight."

Her room on the second floor was much like his own, with twin

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beds and a fine view of the water. While she unpacked a bottle of Scotch he decided, "I really should phone Klas Skepsbron for the publicity kit on tomorrow's film. Think he'd be in the press room this late?"

"You could try," she responded, pouring the Scotch over ice cubes from the room's refrigerator. "Dial 5 and then the room number. It's 457."

As he dialed the first digit she turned out one of the lights, leaving him groping for the rest of the numbers. "There, that's a bit more romantic," she said.

"Please, I'm a happily married man!"

"Even away from home?"

A voice answered his ringing and he recognized Cecil Robbins. "Cecil, I'm calling the press office."

"That's what you got. How are you, Rand?"

"Fine. Is Skepsbron around?"

"I think he's gone for the night. Everyone's gone. I just stopped in to get an extra program."

"All right, see you in the morning."

Rand hung up and reached for his Scotch. "It can wait till tomorrow."

"Of course it can." She settled down next to him on the edge of the bed.

"You know I'm old enough to be your father."

"I've been told that by men before. At Cannes last year—"

"This isn't Cannes, this is Stockholm." He finished his drink and stood up. It was time to be going. "I owe you one," he said as he went out the door. "Good night."

He decided to go up the stairs to his own room rather than wait for the elevator, but as he passed the third floor he saw a vaguely familiar figure hurrying along the corridor. An older man. No one Rand knew, but someone he'd seen a photo of.

Herbert Goosneck.

The ghost himself.

Rand ran back down the stairs and through the glass door to the third-floor corridor, but the man was gone. He'd disappeared into the elevator or one of the rooms. Rand stood there for a moment, wondering what to do next. Then he remembered that Mrs. Norris had a room on the third floor. Was it possible she'd seen the spook too? He tried to remember her room number, but couldn't quite do it.

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He phoned the desk from his own room and was told that she was in Room 346, but there was no answer when he dialed it. He hung up the phone and went back down to the third floor. Her room was halfway along the front corridor, facing the water. As he approached the door he saw that it was propped open a bit with one of the hotel's matchboxes, perhaps for ventilation. There was a light on inside.

"Mrs. Norris?" he called. "It's Rand."

He pushed the door open a little farther and then he saw her, sprawled on the floor near the windows. The scarlet sash of her dressing gown was wrapped tightly around her throat.

It was not the time for Rand to become involved in a police investigation. He left the hotel and called the police from a phone booth in nearby Kungstradgarden. Then he sent a coded cablegram to Hastings in London. When he went back there were three police cars in front of the Grand Hotel. He ignored them and went upstairs to bed.

He was awakened in the morning by a knocking at the door. Susan Wagner was standing there, out of breath. "There's been a murder at the hotel! An Englishwoman who appears in tonight's film!"

"God, what time is it?"

"Seven o'clock. I thought you'd want to know about it."

"Thanks."

"We're partners, aren't we?"

"I suppose so. Let me get dressed and I'll meet you downstairs for breakfast."

Over orange juice, rolls, and coffee, she told him what she'd been able to learn. Someone had strangled Mrs. Norris in her third-floor room shortly before midnight, and had then phoned the police to report it. There were no clues, no evidence of a sexual assault. "Robbins was up all night talking to the police," she concluded. "He's frantic."

"I suppose it's publicity for his film, though."

Her eyes widened. "You think he could kill her for the publicity?"

"No, not really. How long had she been dead when the police found her?"

"Less than thirty minutes, they think. She was at the screening last night, so the killing had to have taken place around eleven."

Rand was remembering the figure in the corridor—the man who looked like Herbert Goosneck. He wondered if Hastings would reply to his cable soon, or if he'd reply at all.

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After breakfast they went up to the press office where Klas Skepsbron was trying his best to fend off reporters' questions. "Please, gentlemen and ladies, my concern is the Festival, not the unfortunate event of last night! I know nothing about the killing of Mrs. Norris, and I can answer no questions about it. The scheduled screening of *Old World Haunts* will go on tonight as planned."

It was nearly noon before Rand finally came upon Cecil Robbins in the hotel lobby. "I haven't slept all night," Robbins said, and his tired eyes confirmed it. "My God, who could have killed her like that?"

Rand was about to mention his sighting in the corridor, but thought better of it. This was no time to contribute to the ghost myth and help publicize Robbins' film even further. "Perhaps a sneak thief," he suggested instead. "Will your film go on as scheduled tonight?"

"Of course, though the killing of Mrs. Norris will certainly put a damper on the press conference."

Skepsbron came up to him then and talked about plans for the press meeting. Since Mrs. Norris was dead it was thought best to speak with the press before the screening rather than after, and this was arranged for seven o'clock. "It'll mean an early dinner," he said, "or a late one."

Robbins considered that. "Well, we still have Gregor, the fellow who played the part of the ghost. He's here in Stockholm, though I didn't originally plan to have him at the press conference."

"All right," Skepsbron agreed. "If you want to, we can keep to our original schedule and you'll have this Gregor for the press instead of Mrs. Norris."

When the delegates began to gather at the nearby theater for the screening that evening, Rand stayed near the back of the auditorium. He was more interested in the faces of the audience than the moving figures on the screen. Hastings had sent him to Stockholm for a purpose, and he was beginning to see what that purpose was. Not to interview Mrs. Norris, who could be seen in England, but to smoke out the other member of Robbins' cast—the elusive Gregor.

But if there was anyone in the audience of critics, producers, starlets, and film buffs who resembled the late Herbert Goosneck, Rand could not spot him. The lights dimmed and the opening credits flashed on the screen. *A Film by Cecil Robbins*, followed immediately by the title in stark white letters against black. *Old World Haunts*.

Rand recognized the familiar English countryside in the first

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scene, as the camera moved along a road to zero in on a little vine-covered cottage. A narrator's voice was heard, and he recognized it as Mrs. Norris, telling about the retired gentleman who lived in the cottage down the road. The audience saw him then, emerging from the little house. Herbert Goosneck, played by the mysterious Gregor. Yes, Rand had to admit, the man looked amazingly like the Goosneck photographs.

And amazingly like the man he'd seen in the third-floor corridor of the Grand Hotel the previous evening.

The images on the screen shifted and Rand saw the late Mrs. Norris herself, working around her cottage while the voice-over narration continued. Obviously she had not been called upon to do any real acting for Robbins' epic. Then the audience saw Goosneck walking along the road, bound for the local pub, with a car approaching fast from behind. The screen seemed to shatter in a stunning visual effect, and then there was only the voice of Mrs. Norris telling about the accident.

The image on the screen gradually reformed itself, but now there was a misty, dreamlike quality to it. Mrs. Norris told of seeing Goosneck later, and the audience saw him on the screen as she described it, moving up the path to his door as if in a vision. She then telephoned the hospital and learned that he had died two days earlier.

The next episode of Cecil Robbins' six-part film dealt with a train traveling through the night in West Germany. Rand watched the first few minutes of it before his attention was attracted by someone leaving his seat and heading for the exit. He saw now that it was Gregor, whom he'd overlooked in his earlier scanning of the audience.

Rand caught up with him outside the theater, where a light rain had started to fall. "Gregor!" he called out, and the man turned.

"I'm Jeff Rand, covering the Festival for *Sight and Sound*." By now the cover story rolled off his tongue with ease. "I've been wanting to interview you about your part in the film I just saw."

The man's eyes were deep and hooded. Standing in a doorway out of the rain Rand could see virtually nothing of his expression. "There will be a news conference later, I believe."

"I know. Will you be at it?"

"I hope to return for it." His accent was from the north of England.

"Robbins says he chose you for the part because of your amazing resemblance to the dead man." It seemed a likely enough guess.

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"Well, I should look something like him, I suppose. Herbert Goosneck was my half brother."

"I see. And your full name is—?"

"Frank Gregor. We never were particularly close, what with me living up in Newcastle."

"But of course you went to his funeral."

"Oh, certainly. I was the only real relative he had left—the only blood relative, that is. He had a wife who left him ten years ago. From what I hear she objected to his work. He was in the Secret Service, you know, before he retired. Spies and double agents and all that business, just like on the telly."

"Do you think he was murdered, Mr. Gregor?"

"I wouldn't want to guess at that. No, sir! I keep my nose clean!"

Someone else was leaving the theater, and Rand glanced up to see Cecil Robbins descending on them. "What are you up to, Rand? I didn't authorize any private interviews."

Rand turned to the director with a smile. "I just learned that Gregor here was the dead man's half brother. That's a nice human-interest touch—a man playing his brother's ghost in a film."

"It was no secret," Robbins muttered.

"Tell me, Mr. Gregor, did you know Mrs. Norris, the unfortunate woman who was killed last night?"

"Never laid eyes on her till yesterday. We filmed our parts of the movie separately."

"Of course," Rand said, sounding as if something had just become clear to him.

Though it was not yet nine o'clock and some two hours of Stockholm's midsummer daylight remained, the sky had grown dark with thickening rain clouds. "I have to get back inside," Robbins said. "They'll want me when the film's over."

Frank Gregor seemed uncertain which way he should go. Finally he shrugged and followed Robbins inside. Rand couldn't help wondering where he'd been headed before his leavetaking was discovered.

During the press conference that followed the film, Rand sat next to Klas Skepsbron in a front row. The questioning of Robbins was fairly routine, although some interest was expressed in the film's visual effects. One astute observer compared the technique of shattered images with the mirror scene in *The Lady from Shanghai*, and Robbins graciously acknowledged his debt to the Orson Welles film.

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But for Rand the most interesting part of the press conference was Frank Gregor's interview. Nothing was made of his resemblance to the dead man, and their relationship was never mentioned. Rand took it all in and asked no questions himself.

Later, strolling back to the Grand Hotel through the wet streets with the Swedish press coordinator, he asked Skepsbron for the film's publicity kit. "I called the press room last night but you weren't there."

"I'm sorry," Skepsbron said. "I know one went to Miss Wagner. Perhaps they assumed you'd be sharing it."

"I didn't even see her there tonight."

"Neither did I," the Swede agreed with a frown. "No matter. Come up to the press office right now and I'll give you a kit."

They took the elevator to the fourth floor and Rand waited while the press coordinator unlocked the room and produced the press kit for *Old World Haunts*. As he locked up again, Rand flipped through the photos and biographical data on the performers. The sheet on Frank Gregor was very brief, mentioning his job with a Newcastle chemical firm. Nothing was said about his half brother.

"Thanks very much," Rand told Klas Skepsbron. "This is just what I need."

"Always glad to be of assistance."

Rand decided to ring Susan Wagner's room, but there was no answer. He sat for a time with the phone in his hand, staring at the dial while the unanswered buzz came in his ear. Zero before one, he thought. These Swedish phones certainly are confusing.

He was thinking about undressing for bed when a knock came on the door. It was Susan.

"I thought you'd still be up," she said. "Got your story written for our magazine yet?"

"Not yet," he admitted. "Come on in. I didn't see you at the screening tonight."

"Wasn't there. Would you believe I was being interrogated by the Stockholm police? They've been questioning me for three hours."

"Why, in God's name?"

"Mrs. Norris had my name and room number on a slip of paper in her purse. I'd phoned her for an interview."

"You didn't tell me that."

She gave him a definitely superior smile. "I decided if you were interested in this woman I should be too. After all, she was much too old to interest you romantically."

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"What age do you think interests me?"

"I'd say around thirty-four."

"Why that age?"

"I read somewhere that men should divide their age by two and then add seven years to find the perfect age for their women."

An alarm seemed to go off in his brain. "So you know my age? And how did you find that out?"

"Oh, I just—"

"From London? What else did you learn?"

She seemed to take a deep breath before plunging in, like a diver poised above a pool. "That you don't really work for the magazine at all. That you're some sort of spy, the same as Herbert Goosneck was. It's all very exciting."

"Aren't you afraid I might strangle you for having that bit of knowledge?"

"Oh, no. You didn't kill Mrs. Norris."

"I'm glad you're so certain."

"But I've got it all figured out who did. Some Russian agents ran down Goosneck back in England because he had something they wanted. Then Mrs. Norris took it out of his house, so they followed her here and killed her to get it."

"That's a nice theory, except for the two years between killings. Russian agents wouldn't have waited that long."

She thought about that. "But I'm right about you. I know that. You came here because of her, didn't you?"

"Not exactly. I came because of Herbert Goosneck. I came because I don't believe in ghosts."

The ringing of his bedside phone interrupted them. Rand answered and heard Cecil Robbins' familiar voice. "Rand!" the producer said softly. "I need help!"

"What is it?"

"Gregor's on his way up here. He's threatening to kill me."

"I'll be right there," Rand said. He bolted toward the door before he remembered Susan. "Go back to your room," he told her.

"Whatever it is, I'm coming with you."

There was no time to argue. He was out the door and running. When he reached Robbins' room he found the door propped open with a matchbox, as Mrs. Norris' had been. He yanked it open and saw Gregor and Robbins struggling near the big open windows.

"Help me!" Robbins shouted. "He's trying to—"

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And then suddenly they twisted by the sill, and Rand saw Gregor's terrified face as he lost his balance and went out.

Robbins collapsed against the sill, staring after him. "Rand—he was going to kill me!"

Rand joined him at the window and looked down at the body in the street four stories below. A crowd was already gathering and one man seemed to be shouting for the police. "I think he moved," Rand said. "He may still be alive."

"But whatever possessed him to—"

"There never was a ghost, Robbins. Herbert Goosneck was run down and killed by enemy agents, probably Russian, seeking a list of names he'd prepared. Two days after Goosneck died in the hospital, Mrs. Norris happened to look out her window and see him—all dressed up—strolling into his cottage. Of course she wasn't seeing a ghost at all. She was seeing Goosneck's half brother Frank Gregor, who'd come down from Newcastle to attend Goosneck's funeral."

"I suppose you're right."

"Of course I'm right. And Gregor found that list of names in the cottage."

"Why didn't the Russians kill him too?"

"Only one explanation comes to mind. They contacted him and he sold them the list."

"My God!"

The siren of an ambulance sounded in the night, growing closer. "Meanwhile, you decided to make a film and you heard about Mrs. Norris' ghostly sighting. Naturally Gregor couldn't come forward and admit that he was the so-called ghost, because that would link him to the missing list. Having already dealt with Russian Intelligence, I doubt if he was too anxious to tangle with our British boys. By chance you saw him in the neighborhood and hired him for your film because he looked like Goosneck."

"Yes, that's correct. That explains it. But why did he kill Mrs. Norris? And why did he try to kill me?"

Rand turned to stare at Cecil Robbins. "Oh, he didn't kill Mrs. Norris, and he wasn't trying to kill you. I was brought here to witness a careful staging, of which any director might be proud. I watched you hurl Gregor out that window in such a way that it appeared you were trying to fight him off. You're the only murderer here, Robbins, and it was you who killed Mrs. Norris."

There were voices from the street below, but neither man looked

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out. Their eyes were locked to each other's faces. "Why would I kill her, Rand? What motive could I possibly have? Do you think I'm a spy too?"

"Not at all," Rand said. "This whole thing involved ghosts and film-making, rather than spies. The spying happened two years ago when Goosneck was killed, and at this late date we may never solve that part of it. But as you know, Mrs. Norris shot her scenes in your film separately from Gregor. In fact, she never laid eyes on him until yesterday when I think he visited her room along with you. But that was enough. Mrs. Norris was a good, hard-headed woman, and she only believed in ghosts until another explanation presented itself. I think as soon as she laid eyes on Gregor she knew the truth—that he wasn't merely an actor playing a part but the supposed ghost in the flesh. She said the ghost had an odd way of walking, as Goosneck did. She must have noticed the same thing about his half brother."

"How does that implicate me?"

"Mrs. Norris was going to tell the truth at the press conference—that there was no ghost, at least in her segment of the film. At the very least you'd have been laughed at in the press. After Gregor left her room last night, and she told you what she planned to do, you killed her in a moment of extreme anger, strangling her with the sash from her dressing gown. The choice of weapon told me it hadn't been a premeditated crime. You left the room immediately, propping the door open with a matchbox so she'd be found. You did the same thing just now after Gregor entered, so I'd be able to open the door and see the little drama you directed. You'd hardly expect me to believe he propped open the door if he planned to kill you."

"You have a logical mind, Mr. Rand."

"But it was the telephone that really spelled out your guilt. Tonight I went to the press room, number 457, with Klas Skepsbron. It was locked, and he relocked it as we departed. I can't believe you found it open when you visited it last night."

"When I—?"

"Remember my phone call? I dialed 5, and then the room number. But I was distracted and the light was poor. I had to feel for the numbers and dial the rest of the number on instinct. You mentioned yourself the confusion with Swedish telephone dials, and I noticed it again this evening. The zero comes before the one, rather than after the nine as on telephones in America, Britain, and most other countries. After I dialed that 5 and the light became poor, I tried to

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dial 457 for the press room but my finger was off by one because of the position of that zero. Instead of 4 I dialed 3, and so on. Instead of 457 I dialed room 346, and you answered the phone. Room 346 was Mrs. Norris' room."

"You think I was there?"

"I know you were there, because the press room would have been locked if Skepsbron and his people were gone. You answered Mrs. Norris' room phone, because at that point you hadn't yet decided to kill her. When you found I thought I had the press room you went along with it. After all, you didn't want a reporter tailing along after you. Then, moments later, when she told you her plan to disclaim the ghost, you killed her without fear, because I hadn't known where you were. Only Gregor knew, of course, because he'd left you both together. I saw him in the corridor a few minutes later, before I discovered the body. Gregor knew, so you lured him up here tonight, phoned me as a witness, and pushed him out the window. He was an older man. You knew you could handle him."

Cecil Robbins cleared his throat. "Do you intend to tell this to the police?"

"Certainly. If Gregor lives he'll back me up."

"I could kill you too, of course."

That was when Susan Wagner spoke from the doorway behind him. "I wouldn't advise that, Mr. Robbins. I've been standing here listening to this whole conversation."

Frank Gregor survived his injuries, and Robbins had little choice but to confess to the murder of Mrs. Norris. *Old World Haunts* won no awards at the film festival, but Rand flew back to London without waiting for the final judging. He felt he'd served Hastings well, even though he still wasn't clear what his assignment had been. Rand was wrong, though, when he assumed the murder of Herbert Goosneck would never be solved.

But that's another story.

"Q"

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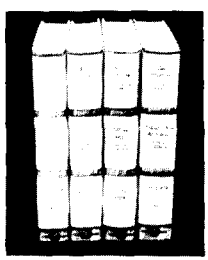

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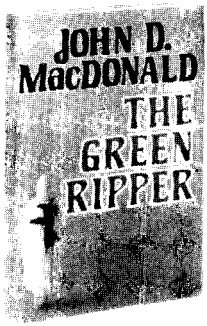

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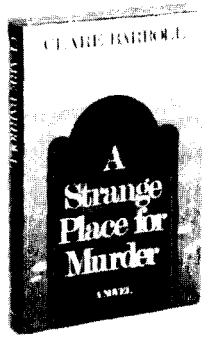

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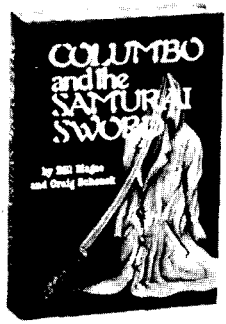

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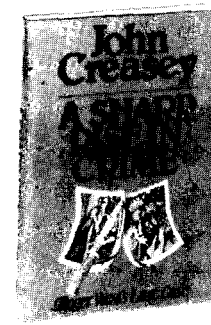

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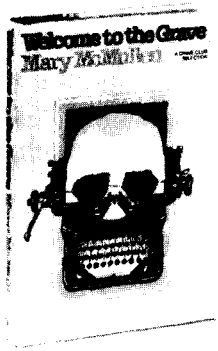

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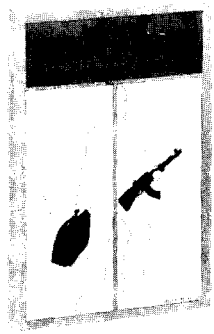

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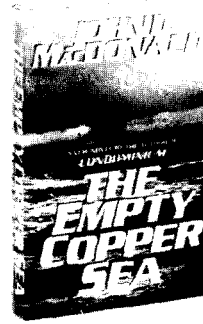

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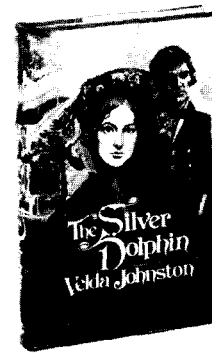

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